



CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
OF THE SAGE ENDOWMENT
FUND GIVEN IN 1891 BY
HENRY WILLIAMS SAGE

Cornell University Library
PS 3157.W65P8

The prairie scout; or, Agatone the reneg



3 1924 022 209 849

olin



Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

PRICE FIFTY CENTS.

THE
PRAIRIE SCOUT,
OR AGATONE,
THE RENEGADE
A ROMANCE
OF
BORDER LIFE



NEW YORK
DEWITT & DAVENPORT
TRIBUNE BUILDINGS

In Press—"HEADS AND HEARTS."—Beautifully Illustrated.

PRAIRIE SCOUT,

AGATONE THE RENEGADE.

A Romance of Border Life.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

THIRD EDITION.

NEW YORK:
DEWITT & DAVENPORT, PUBLISHERS,
TRIBUNE BUILDINGS

DS

ENTERED, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1852, by
DEWITT & DAVENPORT,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Southern District of New York.

-

CONTENTS.

	Page
BIG BILL P.,	5
FAMILY QUARRELS,	13
THE DEPARTURE,	21
DEATH OF THE BETRAYED AND BETRAYER,	29
AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE,	36
'FEELING' THE WAY,	50
THE ENEMY OVERTAKEN,	58
DAVIS THE HALF-BREED,	78
A MEXICAN WAR HORSE,	87
THE DANCING BEAR,	104
THE PRAIRIE SCOUT,	116
THE MANIAC HORSEMAN,	121
A TRAILIN' PARTY,	128
BILL JOHNSON "STUMPED,"	133
DEATH OF THE TRAITOR,	144
'FIXIN'' A YALLER BELLY,	158
THE NIGHT ATTACK,	170
MUSTANGS,	186
A PRAIRIE SCAMPER,	198
THE PERIL—THE RESCUE,	210
A DANGEROUS DELIVERER,	213
THE SELF-ACCUSED,	221
THE GAMBLER'S STORY—THE MURDER,	236
TRIAL BY A TEXIAN JURY,	243
THE EXECUTION,	252
THE ATTACK—THE REPULSE,	259
HE DEAD ALIVE,	269

THE PRAIRIE SCOUT;

OR,

AGATONE THE RENEGADE.

THOSE who dwell amid the strife and busy turmoil of large cities know but little of the powerful interest excited in the breasts of hardy, strong-minded, but unsophisticated men who, living at a distance from direct communication with the busy world, suddenly hear of some great and potent discovery of which they also long to avail themselves. To the feelings thus awakened in my younger days, and shared in by many of my companions, is the public indebted for the following narration of events which are set down as a record of the incidents occurring to one whose life has teemed with adventures of no ordinary character.

As the reader will find a certain vein of affection for my boyhood's home running through the strata of these pages, it is well to inform him that I was born in one of the most sunny spots of a most lovely state. Even now my heart bounds with a quicker pulse at the mention of daring, brave, noble Kentucky! celebrated alike for the hardihood of her sons and the beauty of her daughters. But at the time of the opening of the scenes of this book, I was too young to appreciate the latter, and aimed only to emulate the former. I as well as others yearned for the life beyond the confines of our secluded valley, and sighed for a participation in those deeds of which now and then a rumor reached our ever-attentive ears.

How we envied the careless buoyancy of the released stage-passenger, happy in the prospect of refreshment and rest, and caught at any snatches of intelligence of the outer world his gay loquacity might let fall! But above all, if he came from some distant country like Texas and Mexico—which were then the enchanted lands of our dreams—we watched him with awe and wonder, hung upon his words with a feverish and devouring credulity, treasuring everything as “food for parlance” with our secret thoughts.

It was thus there came back suddenly into our midst a young man whom I remembered well from my earliest childhood; but whom, since his unaccountable departure years before, we had almost learned to consider as among the dead “who make no sign.” He was not a person to be thought of for his own sake, for he was a harsh, ignoble, gawky brute, with desperately freckled face, hirsute hands, and huge, matted masses of fiery red hair. As a “big boy,” alias a grown-up young man, he had been the dreaded tyrant of the village school; for, as he seemed incapable of acquiring even the rudiments of learning, he took a sort of stolid and malignant pleasure in torturing those whose perceptions were quicker than his own. Many a savage blow and ruffianly insult did we have to endure from him uncomplainingly; for, when brought to account, the wretch, with an abject cunning, would unblushingly lie himself free. It caused a general feeling of relief to us all, when the young man’s father, wearied with his hopeless stupidity, at last took him from school and placed him with a merchant, to learn, if possible, how to retail “dry goods.” But even this experiment upon his availability proved a failure.

The fellow was in heart, soul, and body, a ruffian: though the story went, that even he, uncouth as he was, had succumbed to the tender passion. The sentimental spinsters of the village declared, with a sigh, that it was for unrequited love of one of their venerable order, who was only twenty years older than himself, that the inconsolable swain had mysteriously made away with himself; while others, who looked at facts through an atmosphere something less rosy-tinted, hinted rather at a bereaved cash drawer with which he had been too familiar. At

all events, he certainly disappeared between sun and sun without explanation, and where he went few took interest enough in him to inquire ; while the tough "specimen of the antique," to whose obdurate cruelty his evanishment was said to be owing, was forthwith installed by her sympathizing sisters of the "virginal" into the romantic dignity of a heroine who, by the power of her charms, had "killed *her* man !"

For her own part, she looked the character admirably; kept her secret, whatever it was, locked in her own breast; and became thinner, more austere, wrinkled, and religious with each day, until at last she threw herself into the frosty embrace of a church elder of sixty, to make amends for a wasted life in nursing a canting dotard into the grave for his money. This was a man whom I have often known to strip up his nether garment half way up the leg to exhibit with sanctimonious ostentation great cushion-like callosities, which had grown upon the knees from his incessant use of them in offering up long prayers in places to be heard of men.

But as we were saying, the red-haired swain returned into our midst, after an absence of years, quite as unexpectedly as he had gone forth. Nobody knew him at first except myself, and my recognition of his identity was quickened by the memory of aversion. I knew at a glance those hated lineaments and that awkward figure, though the first were now defaced by the white seam of a hideous scar across the yellowish blur of one continued freckle, and the last had been knit together into a rude and massive compactness of outline which expressed great strength and even activity. As he descended from the stage, you first caught through the darkening twilight the gleam of precious metals about his person, and heard the rattle of arms.

When he strode into the full light of the bar-room, we saw that his dress and accoutrements were what seemed to my sensitive and unsophisticated fancy then, strange, fierce, and splendid beyond anything I had deemed possible out of the "Arabian Nights," but which I only recognise now as a vulgar attempt at the perfection of the ruffian coxcombry of the frontier. He wore about his neck an immense guard-chain of gold, the links of which were coarsely wrought, and as large as "the little finger

of a maid's." The monstrous brooch in his coarse shirt bosom was a virgin mass of the same material, roughly wrought into a vague resemblance of that vile and ludicrous reptile, the horned frog, which is nearly peculiar to the plains of Texas. The handles of the pistols at his belt seemed to be of solid silver, so was that of the huge bowie-knife which protruded from his bosom. The buttons of his coat, which was a sort of English shooting jacket, were of large silver coins of Mexico; while his pants, which were of black-dressed buckskin which looked like velvet, were slashed down the outside seam to show the red cloth drawers beneath, with a row of smaller silver coins on either edge, which were connected by a link an inch in length, and of the same precious metal. He wore the Mexican sombrero upon his head, with the broad band of variegated head-work peculiar to it, and over his arm, for it was warm weather, the gaudy serape was thrown. Altogether, it was to me a before unimagined picture of foreign magnificence and formidable show.

The callow youth by some miracle had suddenly sprung into a stalwart and formidable manhood, for I could not now realize the length of time since he had disappeared; and since he had thus come again from some far country with such a gorgeous display of wealth upon his person, it seemed as if I had only been asleep a little while, and lived through the sudden transitions of some wild dream of eastern enchantment. What could it mean? Had this rough brute been favored by the Genii, and found Aladdin's Lamp again?

The articles of dress and accoutrement which are so well known now, were strange to every one then; for Texas was an odd foreign name, just then beginning to be frequently spoken, with no very clear or definite ideas of distance or locality attached to it; and Mexico was the "earthly Paradise" of the Geographies—the golden, glorious, but inaccessible home of conquered Montezumas and Spanish grandeur. The red-haired ruffian strutted to and fro, jingling his chains and enjoying largely the looks of gaping, reverential surprise, with which he was regarded by the crowd of men and boys. At last, in a coarse insolent voice he began to question those around concerning certain citizens of the place, inquiring whether they

were dead yet, and where they lived now. I had known him from the first, and when he mentioned his father's name, in spite of the awed repulsion felt towards him, the pent-up excitement, which had now reached the explosive intensity in my little breast, burst forth, and I shouted or rather screamed aloud,

"Boys, it's big Bill P.!" and then there was a general roar of instantaneous recognition. The wretch, with a hideous attempt at a smile, which only turned the coarse, stiff lips wrong side out, and showed great yellow fangs like those of a butcher's bull-dog, stepped towards me, saying,

"Damn you, Ruffles,* what did you tell for!" and stretched out his coarse hand to clutch my ear, with the same brutal gesture I had learned so long ago to dread. The novelty of the scene, the recollection of my old hate, everything combined, had wrought me up to a pitch of uncontrollable nervous excitement, and with the blood almost starting from my face, I burst forth into yells of rage, and struck at him in blind fury, without knowing what I did. He at first seemed as if he were going to annihilate me with a savage blow, but then something like shame appeared to restrain him, and he merely seized both my hands in one of his, and held me helpless as an infant in his vice-like grasp until the paroxysm had in some measure expended itself. He now released me, and with a hyena chuckle complimented me upon my "pluck," as he called the nervous spasm of wonder, fright, and hate, which had so over-mastered me for the moment.

However, the immediate result was not very serious, for ever after this incident the ruffian appeared to have taken an uncouth sort of patronizing liking to me. He first attempted to coax me by the offer of presents, which, singular as the objects were to me, I rejected with disdain; but when he proposed to talk to me of his adventures and tell me of what they had been, then my unconquerable curiosity concerning such subjects overcame my loathing gradually, and we became almost good friends, while I sat for hours and listened to him.

He had been away to the remote and unknown country of

* A nick-name by which I was known at the time we went to school together; given to me because I wore ruffles, while the other boys wore plain collars, or as often none at all.

Texas, and wonderful indeed were the narrations which he had to give concerning its Mexican rancheros, traders, and robbers; concerning its fierce wild tribes of lance-bearing Indians on their swift horses, their long black hair, streaming to the winds, bedizened with circlets and bunches of dyed feathers; its innumerable buffalo and wild horses, in great herds, pouring over flowery plains like dark, thundering rivers overflowed; its ferocious beasts—the bear, the puma, cougar, hyena, and leopard cat; and of his few countrymen, its more ferocious settlers, in their first deadly collisions with the bloody cowardice of the base soldiery of Mexico.

Though he was ignorant and rude, yet he had seen everything vividly; and with a graphic skill that was entirely unconscious, but which I have often noticed to be possessed by such men of rude, adventurous lives, he always seized upon the salient points of his picture, and gave you, perhaps in two words, or at most in a sentence, those features which define it to you at once—show it to be unlike anything else. Thus, though his lips were stiff, his enunciation slow, his language mean, studded with horrid blasphemies and a mongrel slang, part Mexican, American, and Indian, yet somehow he managed to give me a strikingly real description of everything concerning which he spoke; though this may have been owing, in a great measure, to the eager and pertinacious curiosity with which I followed up his least suggestive word with close questioning, until I had drawn out from him, to the satisfaction of my own mind, all that was necessary to the full elimination of the object or scene.

Thus, though his mind was void of fancy to the bleakness of a "Cimmerian waste," yet I obtained from him a warm and glowing picture of the tropical productiveness of this new land; of its rich and yellow fruits; of its vast flower-robed prairies; of its mighty forest tangles, draped with long, grey, drooping moss, matted and wreathed with long vines that hung their snake-like garlands in fierce colored clusters of poisonous bloom "in the sick air;" of its cotton "*tree*," with huge boles; of its marvellous productiveness in all grains; and last, its untold and unimaginable wealth in the precious metals and stones; its gold and silver mines, far to the north and west, among the mountains, to reach

which you must pass over arid plains, to fight your way through the country of ferocious Indian tribes. Here I failed to obtain that sort of strict definiteness of outline which I had succeeded in drawing out in other cases.

There was plenty of gold there, for he showed me his uncouth brooch, which had been wrought by a frontier blacksmith from a large lump of the virgin ore, obtained by himself from a Mexican, or rather Spanish trader of the Rio Grande, who professed that he obtained it, with other lumps and bars which I was permitted to handle, from high up the valley of "the Great River," in traffic with tribes of peaceful Indians who seemed to have much gold among them. Other unwrought specimens of silver he showed me, which he said he had picked up, during a solitary trapping excursion, among the mountains north-west of San Antonio de Bexar. Other lumps of gold had been obtained, while he was a trapper, in trading with the roving Indians of the plain, who all pointed to the north-west as the direction whence it came; yet he could give me no clear idea of localities, and seemed to think this gold region so remote and difficult of approach, that the time would hardly ever come when white men would reach it to possess its treasures.

There must have been between one and two thousand dollars worth—though, to my simplicity, there seemed to be far more—of these precious metals which he thus exhibited to me, mostly in the crude state in which they had been obtained by him one way or another during his wild and multifarious wanderings by mountain, river-side, and plain. With the recklessness characteristic of the desperate adventurer, he seemed to be quite indifferent to the value of the glittering store with which he thus dazzled my boyish vision; and would frequently, with almost childish carelessness, offer me pieces that seemed to me of such value, that I drew back in astonishment and dread from the dangerous temptation. Of course my youthful and impressible fancy greatly exaggerated the munificence of these reckless proffers; but then, when in addition I frequently saw the younger children of his father's family, and even the little negroes playing about the floor of the house with some of the smallest of these lumps, which he would throw to them, and probably never think of afterwards, un

less brought back to him by the older members of the family, this very careless disregard of what other men are so careful of, excited me still more.

Young as I was, it is not surprising it appeared to me a matter of wonder that he must be amazingly sure of his resources before he could be so inexplicably indifferent; that he must know for a certainty where and how he would be able easily to replace the treasures he was thus throwing about the house like common pebbles; and then as a necessity I could but come to the conclusion that he had not told me all he knew—that there must be something behind all this yet to reveal. It could not be but there was a covert motive in this seemingly studied vagueness of speech as to the manner in which he had obtained these metals, and as to the localities of the different deposits from which they had been obtained by others.

Doubtless he chose to keep such information to himself, for his own benefit and that of his immediate family. Who could blame him, supposing this to be true; for as he was only a private adventurer, and *not* a public officer receiving pay of the government for the express purpose of making such discoveries by survey for the public benefit, he was not bound to make any disclosures but such as he chose.

It will have been perceived that my first impressions with regard to Texas and gold-mines were of a nature not to be readily dismissed. They were thus invested to me with all that gorgeous and indefinite romance which fired the Spanish chivalry in the days of the New World discovery and conquest. My warm and restless fancy seized upon all the details which could be drawn from this man, and made them a portion of its “life estate” of day dreams; and many deeds of high enterprise and desperate venture worthy of Castilian knighthood, did I see and win through half-clouded eyes in this romantic and wonderful land of strange virgin loveliness and boundless wealth. P. did not stay long, but returned, taking with him two of his brothers, to be followed in time by the whole family. But we shall come again to this man’s history before we get through with our narrative; for the present it must **give way** to other details.

CHAPTER II.

FAMILY QUARRELS.

It was a savage and remarkable race—these P.'s. The patriarch of them all was an old man of eighty years when I can first remember him. For fifteen years he seemed to me unchanged. His tall slender form remained slightly bowed, and his thin white hair I never could discover grew any thinner; nor did his old eyes to the last look any more bleared and watery, nor were the deep seams in his face cut any deeper. I never saw him but with an undefined feeling of curious awe; for with his six gigantic sons around him, he always reminded me of an old thunder-blasted oak that the storms since had spared, to lift its bowed and splintered head amidst the rank and overtoppling forest of its shoots, which, while they kept off the blessing of the sun's rays, would not let it even decay beneath their chilling shadows; and so it was with the poor old man, his heart and life seemed both "astonied" by the horrible ingratitude of his brutal boys. He was a very quiet man, and had a subdued and absorbed look, but was a fierce and pitiless hater withal. He seemed to live for and upon hate; it had become "a kind of nutriment!"—and most fearful of all, hate for his own offspring! He was at desperate feud with all of them except one. They frequently threatened each other's lives; and curses so awful and bitter as he would let fall upon their grey heads, it is well that men do not often hear. Their ages ranged from thirty-five to sixty; and yet, strange to tell, their heads were all, with a single exception, prematurely whitened. They were greatly above the medium size, and some

of them were of very imposing forms, though the faces of most of them were blotched by debauchery. All these men were at desperate enmity with each other likewise, and these unnatural dissensions resulted finally in a dreadful tragedy.

The man of most wealth and acknowledged standing and ability among them was the father of Bill P., of whom I first spoke. He was at deadly enmity with the father and all the other brothers. He was a man of fine presence, with a face expressing great suavity, with intellectual astuteness, yet he was known to be and dreaded as a man of bloody and vindictive passions. In a street fray he had once cut a man almost literally to pieces, inflicting some twenty wounds upon him with a long knife, and with such rapidity that the bystanders had no time to realize that the man was hurt before he fell dead, killed as many times over as there were wounds,—if such a thing be possible,—for any one of them was mortal. Those were rude times, and his wealth and the plea of self-defence were sufficient to release him. Nor was this all; for it was rumored that he had fought duels with fatal results.

Yet in spite of these dark shadows upon his life, he was not only one of the most influential persons in the country, but one of the most universally respected and beloved; and the population was as good as any in Kentucky, or the southwest. His mind was of a very commanding order; he was extraordinarily active, public-spirited, and benevolent—the liberal and kind father of an unusually large family—for he had married young, and his wife had borne him eighteen children, all but one of them boys. He was reputed one of the best masters in the country; just but lenient as a public officer, he was universally approved and even admired for impartiality, and he would accept no office for either its honors or emolument, but, as it seemed, for the practical good he could accomplish through its means. How, then, could he be otherwise than highly popular and influential in these comparatively new social conditions, in which such common attributes of good citizenship are necessarily so highly esteemed? Indeed, I have no hesitation in saying that had good citizenship been entitled to a civic crown, it would certainly have been unanimously awarded to this man, in spite of all the past. His character was most deci-

dedly contrasted with that of his brothers, who were dissipated and turbulent men. I have said that he was at feud with all his brothers ; but there was one, the youngest, who died before I can remember, and whom he professed to love very much. He was literally the " Benjamin—the child of his old age," to the patriarch who loved him deeply.

He must have been the only redeeming spirit among them, for it was always said of him that he was the genius and orator of the family ; and the proof of his being a man of some parts existed at the time of his early death in a considerable fortune, which had been legitimately amassed at the bar, in his profession as advocate or pleader, in criminal cases. He had an only child, a daughter, then very young ; and she, upon his death-bed, he left in charge of this elder brother John D. P., along with her whole fortune in trust for her benefit. As this child grew up along with his own daughter, no stranger could have discovered, or even suspected, that she was other than his own child, unless the difference of features had suggested something. Indeed, although we were constantly playmates as children, I did not know this fact until we were all nearly grown up ; and one chief and standing topic of praise of this " model-citizen," common throughout the country, was this seemingly entire adoption on his part of the little orphan, and tender faithfulness to his beloved brother's holy trust. The people forgave him for hating those that were alive in consideration of his truth to him that was dead, and found many ingenious excuses for his want of sympathy with such dissipated men, in the creditable fact that he himself was a strictly sober man. So although nobody ever knew what had become of the little orphan's property, and though some few enemies—the other brothers particularly—intimated pretty roundly that there was something very mysterious and inexplicable in the business, the public raised the hue and cry of indignant rebuke at any imputation upon the honor of their favorite, and would not hear of the possibility that he would not honestly and strictly render up an account of his trust when the child came of age.

Perhaps there never was witnessed a more striking instance of the unanimity of public sentiment in favor of any one man than this afforded. " He has lived among us since his boyhood," they

would say, "and we should know the man by this time, nearly 50 years. We know he is vindictive when wronged, and that his anger is very dangerous when roused ; but then he is courteous and peaceful when not assailed, strictly orderly and honorable in his dealings ; in a word, the general tenor of the man's life gives the lie utterly to any such foul insinuations—away with them!"

His accusers were literally obliged to hide their heads from the storm. There was my uncle—than whom a man of more clear-souled honor and stern integrity never breathed God's blessed air, who had been his partner in business for twenty years—he would at any time have defended him against such imputations as promptly and as fiercely as himself. There was my father, a just, dignified, God-fearing, honorable man, who had been for the same length of time his family physician and intimate friend ; and yet, who seldom had his habitual equanimity so promptly ruffled, as upon the occasion of any insinuation against the character and motives of this extraordinary person. By the way, *my mother* always detested him without knowing why, and would only visit his house when he was away from home, although she loved his meek and gentle wife.

These two men were equally esteemed with himself, and of the same social rank ; they had possessed the very best opportunities for sounding the depths of his nature, and yet we shall see that they, along with a majority of the men of their class, continued long, through the most astoundingly terrible developments and events, to be his closest friends and warmest defenders. When I come to think of all the patient and diabolical subtlety of this man's nature, when once the temptation of gold, of unbounded wealth, was presented to him, I feel myself shudder and sicken with a hopeless feeling of distrust of all mankind, and every "outward seeming."

His son had now returned, as I have related, and brought back with him the stories and the palpable evidences of enormous wealth to be obtained in Texas. The model citizen appeared to pay little attention to these stories, which he pretended to regard as the wildest and most improbable romance ; he was too much absorbed in his grave duties as father, master, and public officer, to have leisure for such trifling.

To be sure, when one of his boys, then just verging upon manhood, exhibited some restlessness and anxiety to adventure in that direction, he did not oppose his wishes, but invested a considerable sum for him in sheep, which were then bringing large prices along the new Red River Settlements, and sent him off to trade for himself. Mark you, it was *not* to Texas that the young man was sent—so the excellent father said!

Everybody thought it was very natural that he should want to get such a loose-jointed, coarse booby out of his sight, as this “Kit” or Columbus was. This fellow, “Kit,” was a far baser wretch than his brother, for he was as pusillanimous as the other was ruffianly, and was thought to be admirably well disposed of, as a sheep-drover. In eight or ten months he returned, having been, as it was rumored, very successful. At all events, an immense flock of sheep was this time purchased in a great hurry, for a return trip. To pay for these, the model citizen drew heavily upon the credit of the firm of which my uncle was his partner. Thus matters went on for another year, and in the meantime it began to be noticed that he was gradually selling off all his property except his negroes. The excuse for this was, that the vicissitudes of this new trade rendered heavy outlays constantly necessary, and people only thought that it was nobody’s business but his own.

Not so with one of his brothers, Matthew, or Mat, as he was called, who openly accused him of an intention to get all his property out of the country, and thus defraud his orphan niece. As usual the whole country was indignant, but this time Mat would not be silenced by the hue and cry, and continued pertinaciously to proclaim aloud the evidences of his brother’s intended villany; for he said, “the girl is now nearly come of age, and as he has used up her estate, and has no intention of making any restitution, see he is every day selling off some portion of his lands, and preparing to run away to Texas! It is in Texas where he has been opening a plantation for years past, instead of Arkansas, as he pretends! See, he sends off eight or ten negroes every year ‘to help to drive the sheep,’ as he says, but in reality to get them out of the country, for we all know that none of them have ever come back yet!”

These were very serious charges, and in spite of the general confidence, the eyes of the public began to be turned upon the character of these proceedings. This annoyed the model citizen, and in the coolest manner possible he resolved to put a stop to it, as it was interfering with his purposes. He went to work accordingly, to enrage his brother Mat to the highest possible degree of fury, that he might take him at advantage. Mat was a drunkard, and abused his wife. John now all at once interfered, to "protect" her, as he called it, and directed public attention from his own movements, to the brutality of his brother, which his interference only made more notorious, of course. This, as he expected, drove Mat into an ungovernable fury, and he repeatedly threatened John's life.

This, in the eyes of the law, is justification of murder. When this point had been attained securely by the repeated drunken blustering of the harmless sot about the streets of the town, the model citizen one day put a great blunderbuss of a holster pistol, heavily loaded with buck-shot, into his pocket, took a pinch of snuff, and walked out of the store on to the street; as he walked down it, his brother Mat was sitting engaged in some maudlin gossip, near a door on the side-walk; as he came opposite he stopped, Mat looked up, and seeing that hated brother with the deadly glare of Cain in his eye stand before him, sprang in a flurried manner to his feet, and commenced fumbling confusedly in his pockets behind him. The model citizen deliberately drew his blunderbuss, and the frightened sot commenced retreating; but no, the inexorable fate was upon him, and that terrible brother, with cool and steady aim, fired at his head. The poor wretch spun round and round, blindly staggered a few steps inside the door, and fell sweltering in his blood. The model citizen returned his big pistol to his pocket, took out his silver snuff-box, rapped it twice, as usual, took a pinch, and walked back to his store with his usual business step.

The people were wild with horror at this monstrous crime, thus committed with business-like deliberation in the broad daylight, and in the open street. Women sickened and fell down in swoons; men grew white as death, and shivered with loathing dread. The thing was too infernal—too hideous to be realized!

It could not possibly be that the pistol was loaded—that the blood they pointed at with shaking fingers on their street, was blood shed by the hand of a brother! Horror! horror! horror! Can it be? Is he dead? was whispered from one to another, by pale lips of shuddering men that gathered about the house, while the model citizen was sitting in a careless posture upon the counter of his own store, and with bland and smiling face, relating the circumstances of the appalling murder; for he and every one else outside of the house into which Mat staggered, supposed the man must be dead of course.

I have witnessed many bloody deaths, and much suffering, but I shall forget everything else before the memory of that day can pass from me. It fell like a bolt from a cloudless sky, and astounded me into a new realization of the dreadful possibilities of life! God of heavens! what an awful crime it seemed to me! It nearly took my breath to think of it; and when there was a rumor came out into the street from my father, who was ministering in his professional capacity to the wretched victim, that he was not dead, and that there was even a possibility of his surviving, my chest was heaved with long-drawn breathings, and I once more dared to look up to heaven, without fear that it was falling upon the earth to blot it out for such a crime. I felt as if the good God had spared the earth in preventing this unnatural sin!

Inexpressibly great was the astonishment of all those who had witnessed the deed, when the physicians announced that they did not consider the wounds as fatal, immediately at least; that there was a probability of the man's surviving for a considerable time—it might be years! And strangely enough, it turned out that the deadly and infernal malignity of the intended murderer had, in some measure, defeated his own purpose. He had intended to shoot his brother full in the face, and as his face shrank to one side before the deadly tube, this dogged purpose followed in unconscious aim, the first mark, until, when the pistol exploded, only the side of the face was presented; and although that was crushed almost into a jelly by the shot, and the principal bones broken, they slanted off from the brain, which was not fully penetrated by any of them, though one or two were thought to be

lying against its membranous covering, and would, of course, continue to constantly endanger his life.

But enough of these revolting details, which must by this time seem somewhat irrelevant to the subject matter of our book ; but a little patience will show that they are not so by any means. As a literal detail of actual events which I have long yearned with the feeling that it is a sort of duty on my part to give to the public, they will also be found to constitute a consistent part of that personal reminiscence of motive and experiences, which I from the first proposed to give, and which have led me to such strong convictions with regard to the existence of vast and undeveloped resources of mineral wealth, within the unexplored interior of our Continent ; the road to which, and even through or over which, lies within the boundaries of Texas.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEPARTURE.

BUT to continue the outlines of my narrative. Not the least remarkable part of this extraordinary affair is, that so soon as the people were relieved of that burden of horror which had weighed upon them in the thought of Mat's actual death, a great reaction immediately occurred in the feeling towards their favorite, the model citizen. At first there had been great danger of the excitement finding a vent in some act of prompt and summary vengeance; but then, as the man was not killed at all, it altered the case materially.

Murmurs of partial exculpation began to be heard, and in the course of a day or two many of our best citizens began to express openly the opinion that there were many things which went to excuse the act. First, it was insisted that he evidently did not intend to kill his brother, as was plain enough from the manner in which he had aimed; but only to teach him a sound lesson by mutilating him somewhat. A stopper was unfortunately put upon this charitable construction when it leaked out, that the only time when his equanimity had appeared at all ruffled, had been when the news came to him while he still sat on the counter, by this time talking indifferently with his partner upon business subjects, that his brother was not killed. He started slightly, and said in a tone of hearty vexation, "Damn him, it's a pity!" then resumed the subject of his conversation with my uncle.

This was a right hard pill for his admirers to swallow;

and yet such was the blind confidence in the man's integrity, of all who thought they knew him best, that there seemed to be a resolute purpose among them to find him guiltless, though there was a party far stronger in numerical strength which still regarded him with implacable sternness, and were determined to visit upon him the utmost vengeance of the law. His defenders, now that poor Mat was out of immediate danger, opened furiously upon his reputation, which was bad enough, for drunkenness and brutality to his wife. He evidently intended to have murdered John, if John had not shot him; he had threatened his life time after time in public places, and but the day before had sworn to shoot him the next time he saw him in the street: that at the very time when John shot him, he was endeavoring to extricate a pistol, which had got entangled in his coat-pocket behind, with the intention of putting his repeated threats into execution then, and that John had only been too quick for him, &c., &c., &c. It was thus the evidence they brought forward on the trial ran, going to make it out a clear case of self-defence, and therefore in any result justifiable.

But it was upon his trial that the extraordinary subtlety, tact, and intellectual force of this man's nature became most strikingly apparent. He employed no counsel, but defended his own cause, standing alone amidst a strong array of the best forensic talent of the country on the other side. The case excited immense interest, and there was a great crowd collected from far and near to hear it through several days. The victim, who was by this time able to get out, was there, with face muffled in bandages, confronted with his intended murderer. Though a man of coarse nature, he would have been a rather noble-looking brute but for his habits of vulgar excess. Confinement and suffering had removed many of these marks; and now with his glossy black hair—the single exception among them—and the livid pallor of those portions of his face which could be seen, he offered a striking contrast with the grey hair and ruddy faces of the other brothers who were gathered eagerly in and about the bar. He was evidently cowed and terrified at the sight of John, and it took some time for his heavy nature to regain self-command. The fratricide, with his bland, indifferent gaze as he turned it slowly about

him, measured his victim over his spectacles while taking a pinch of snuff, and then quietly addressed himself to the arrangement of his papers.

As the case progressed, the opposing lawyers, who had expected easy work in making out their case, when they found themselves opposed by a man who was not known to have made law a study, and certainly never practised it in the courts, began to find that they had been reckoning without their host. In a very little while judge, jury, and audience at least became convinced that he knew as much about law as the whole of them, for he met them promptly in all the "low dodges" of special pleading, as well as upon precedent and general principles. When the examination of the more important witnesses came on, he showed that he had been rather indulging in a slight gladiatorial display of intellectual prowess with the lawyers for the purpose of infusing into them a little wholesome respect, than been really in earnest as yet.

Now the surprising abilities of the man came out for the first time in his life perhaps in their true light. In the cross-questioning of these witnesses he made his case without the necessity of pleading, in spite of the common sense of court, jury, and public. He had never intended to play the advocate for his own cause, as he knew that would place him at disadvantage, but saw that he must succeed in producing the necessary effect at this point, or never. And he did produce it. These principal witnesses that stood in his way were the intimate personal friends of his brother, and mostly like himself dissolute and unprincipled men. He knew them thoroughly, and the general public knew little, though there was suspicion.

He first made it evident to *themselves* that he had possessed himself of many facts with regard to their past history which they supposed it impossible for him to be informed of, and the publicity of which would be anything but desirable. He then gave them to understand by the most subtle indications, the meaning of which was for the most part apparent only to themselves, that having it in his power he intended to make them "own up" to these things or forswear themselves, and be driven out of court into the penitentiary. This discomposed

and frightened the fellows, who, with everybody else, had now become so thoroughly impressed by the unexpected resources of legal acquirement he had already displayed, that they were prepared to expect anything from him. They lost confidence in themselves; even when they were telling the plain, straightforward truth, with the quiet threatening of his cold grey eyes upon them, searching their consciousness to its very depths, they became confused and, what he intended they should become, inconsistent.

In this way he served the three most important witnesses of the complaint, until they had involved themselves with themselves and each other to such a hopeless degree, that it was not considered necessary to argue the case; and the judge, after a short charge, sent out the jury, who returned in a few hours with a verdict of acquittal—so plain a case of justification in self-defence had it been made out to them. There was a general rejoicing at the verdict, for the *public* were for the time as much impressed as the jury and court had been; and I have frequently since heard men of high legal attainments and general intelligence express the opinion that this defence fully equalled if not surpassed in cunning and intellectual astuteness that of the famous Eugene Aram.

The cases are not unlike so far as the absolute criminality, and the cool, inexorable subtlety of the criminals is concerned. Mat died within the second year after receiving his wounds, as his physician said he probably would on the trial, of the dropping in of the shot—which could not be extricated—upon the brain through its abraded membranous covering, so that John was a fraticide in deed, which is worse than the crime of Eugene Aram. Then by this time it became perfectly evident that this murder was only a part of a long and deliberately planned scheme of villany even more unnaturally monstrous—if there be such a possibility—than fraticide itself. Poor Mat, by his pertinacious accusations, had unfortunately placed himself in the way of the success of this scheme, and his murder was determined upon as deliberately as if he had been some troublesome wild vermin that by foraging upon his hen-roost interfered with his enjoyment of the luxury of fresh eggs for breakfast.

The truth then became evident, though it had always existed in reality, that the wretched Matthew was only formidable to John, or to anybody else, through his tongue; that John did not choose to have public attention attracted to his operations in this way, and so became suddenly officious in interfering between Mat and his wife, whom he now took occasion to protect and carry home with him because she had been beaten; though it was notorious that this same thing had been repeated over and over again for years past; that he knew his brother perfectly in doing this, as it caused him to commit himself in his drunken ravings by threats of personal violence so openly made as to furnish him justification in the letter of the law for murdering him to stop his mouth; that it was John who stopped in the street before his brother, as if to invite attack, and that if the frightened and bloated boaster *did* have a pistol in his coat pocket, and *was* attempting to draw it, a man of John's astonishing coolness must have seen perfectly that there was neither any danger of his getting the pistol out of his pocket, nor of using it to any effect if he did.

But why stop there, if it was not with the purpose to kill him in the first place, and then why follow up his shuffling and shrinking retreat with his relentless aim, if death was not the determination? The pistol was found in the wounded man's pocket, but it was so entangled in the lining by the lock that it could never have been extricated without tearing away the whole skirt.

All these facts, as well as the devilish petulance of the remark, "Damn him, it's a pity!" went comparatively for nothing on the trial, and before the cool, subtle, imperative intellect of this strange man. But when the facts which followed in deliberate but astounding succession had time to settle with their legitimate impressions into the mind of the public, then the scales fell from all eyes, and men realized what a hideous lie his life had been throughout. The friends who had been nearest to him before, now, by an inexplicable process of self-delusion, convinced themselves that it was *he* who had been the injured party throughout, and clung to him with a deeper and more affec-

tionate confidence than ever before. This did not move for an instant the inexorable purpose of the man with any symptoms of relenting, but rather, from the sense of security it afforded, seemed to precipitate his action.

He had now, by repeated drafts upon the firm, not only abstracted his own share of the capital, but considerably infringed upon that of my uncle. Having announced his purpose to make one more trading venture heavier than all the rest, and which was to be the last, he proceeded to make very large investments in stock in such a way that the cash payments falling upon the firm, my poor, confiding uncle was compelled to meet them by disbursing what few thousands there were left in his control. He did this, however, without a murmur, and in the face of the avowed fact that the negroes were now nearly all gone, and the rumor that a cash sale of the homestead plantation was in negotiation. The rumor he did not believe, as this friend and partner of twenty years had not mentioned any such thing to him; and as for distrusting him, he would distrust his own soul first!

Honorable man! He was very far from lacking astuteness; indeed was remarkable for his shrewd and searching insight of character, and for his bitter and uncompromising scorn of meanness and falsehood: yet how fatally was he blinded in this case!

As the preparations for this great trading expedition were brought to a close, symptoms of a new hue and cry from all the other brothers united began to be heard. They demanded, as the orphan girl was now of age, that John D. P. should make restitution of her property at once, before leaving the country, with all his own property as well as that of his partner. Things had progressed so far now that he cared very little for what they said: he merely answered contemptuously that he should make the restitution when it suited his convenience, and that furthermore, he was not about to leave the country at all; that he merely intended to accompany his son Kit part of the way to *Arkansas*, until his stock were broken to the road, and then he should return to answer all charges in proper person, as

they had lately had good evidence of his willingness to do ! This satisfied my uncle perfectly, as well as the community, and again the obstreperous brothers were frowned into silence.

Thus he started with his great droves of stock, accompanied as usual, for the first day's drive, by my uncle, my father, and many of his friends, who rode with him in advance as a sort of triumphant escort of honor intended to exhibit to his enemies the unshaken confidence and respect of the man whom they so pertinaciously traduced. Along with my cousin Frank, a noble, high-spirited, handsome fellow, some four years older than myself, I formed one of the body-guard. The scene made a powerful impression upon me : sometimes at a long stretch of the road I would look back upon an immense herd of 7 or 8,000 hogs filling its whole breadth for more than a mile ; then, in the rear of these, the white and close-wedged masses of several thousand sheep ; and then, far behind these, I would catch a glimpse of the dark phalanxes of mules coming into sight for a moment as they wound along the hillsides. It was a great four-footed army, that seemed as if it must sweep the granaries of the land as it passed through ; and, together with the twenty negroes and the hired white drivers in a still greater number, struck me as a most imposing exhibition of the enterprise and daring of one man. For all this tide of living creatures was to be controlled and guided over every obstruction, and most of the way through a new country, more than a thousand miles before the ostensible market could be reached. Certainly much that was surprising, much even of grandeur was to be perceived in the character of South-western enterprises in those days !

The first day's progress was only some eight or ten miles, when we reached a large caravansary, or country tavern, standing at a great crossing of three or four different routes. Here the animals were all penned, with the view of separating them into three detachments the next morning, when they would each take a different route leading in the same general direction, that provender for so large a number might be insured by distribution over a wider surface. We were to return that evening to town, and I shall not soon forget the parting between my uncle and this man. The last moments were passed in rapid but not

in the slightest degree flurried recapitulations of those small items of business purport which, having been left unprovided for in the hurry, required at least temporary adjustment during his intended absence of a few weeks. These my uncle listened to with that strict attention characteristic of the scrupulously honorable man receiving ever so small a charge from a friend, because he intends to fulfil it to the letter. On the features of both men equally there was that profound and happy repose which comes of the security of entire trust, and disarms a parting of all bitterness. They looked and spoke like men who were only separating, as they had done, with short intervals, each day for twenty years, to go to their respective houses for the night, and return again to meet in the morning. My uncle Frank was a few years the youngest, and it was an amiable pleasantry of his to keep his partner constantly reminded of the fact, so at parting he shook him by the hands and said slily, "Take care of yourself, John; remember you are growing old!" "Good bye, Frank; remember me to the missus!" *

* A jocose mode of designating the matron of a family common in the South, and derived partly from chivalric associations and partly from negro slang.

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH OF THE BETRAYED AND BETRAYER.

THUS these two men parted for ever on earth! with a familiar and affectionate jest on either side—a jest that embodied all that there had been of uninterrupted kindliness and mutual confidence between them for many long years! Yet, when I came to think over this scene afterwards, the only thing in the manner of the traitor which at all expressed anything like consciousness on his part, was that he took a pinch of snuff—immediately on letting fall the hand of the friend he was betraying—just as he did after shooting his brother Mat!

But now, to cut a long story short, a month passed, and there was no return of the “model citizen.” My uncle was not in the slightest degree shaken by all the taunting clamors which now rose afresh around him. He had still a thousand or two in unbroken credit left, and continued to supply, without stint, the necessities of the wife of his partner and her large family, with quite as conscientious scrupulousness as if he had just received from him a reiterated injunction to that effect by the last mail, accompanied by a satisfactory explanation of the causes of delay.

Though months and months still passed, and no such word of confirmation or consoling came from his partner, and the sneering clamors grew more and more obstreperous about his ears, he still went steadily on in the sublime assurance of his trust, and ministered equally to the wants of his partner’s helpless

family, with those of his own, out of what remained to him yet of funds and credit.

A year had now passed. His eastern credit was gone for ever. My uncle was a hopeless bankrupt ! Still his faith would not give way, though his buoyancy in some measure did. He had written several letters to John, and in that wild country they might miscarry ! he would certainly either answer him satisfactorily or return himself soon. Indeed he expected him every day, and should not be surprised any minute to see him come in, with his old look of friendship, bringing in his hands the means of retrieving their lost credit. In the meantime he would, so long as a cent remained, meet the expenses of *his* family as well as those of his own !

But when it now came to light that the man who cultivated the Homestead Plantation, as it had been thought at first, merely upon shares, was the real owner, and showed the evidences that he had purchased it for cash, and demanded of the old and helpless wife of the model citizen that she should vacate the premises, then a full realization of the terrible blow came to my uncle ! God of heaven ! betrayed and beggared ! The whole crushing truth came down upon his strong and manly head, like an avalanche of sorrow, and he never lifted his bowed neck again !

Had the fiendish fratricide turned that assassin pistol upon his heart, and sent a ball right through its centre, he could not have cut him down more suddenly. In full health apparently he walked heavily to his house, laid himself down upon his bed, and in a few hours he was found to be dying !

What an awful sight was that ; a strong man dying of a broken heart ! Not one atom of his round, full, powerful frame had been wasted ; his flesh was firm, and the veins full of blood as ever ; his face, not even paled by the present sickness, wore the usual ruddy flush of perfect health, and yet to see him lie there gasping for breath ! while above the horrifying stillness, that fearful stertorous breathing which indicates the approach of death, grew thicker and hoarser with each moment, and the soft pink flush of life faded slowly before the thick, purplish hue that crept surely and icily up from the deadened extremities.

My God ! it was the most dreadful sight ever witnessed ! Not that death itself is so appalling ; not that it is so unusual to see men who appear to be in full health lie down and die ; but that the cause seems so dreadful ! to die of too much truth, and faith, and honor ! To die of what should make us live for ever ! It seems that falsehood, hate, and shame should kill men ; that they should die of their sins, of their perversions, and not of what is most holy and harmonious in them ! And yet it was so with my poor uncle ; he had cast everything upon one die, and it had turned out to be a loaded one ! He had been swindled out of all that was dearest to him in life—his good name, the means of supporting his family, whom he proudly loved more than life, and the closest friend of his life beyond that family. All were gone ! The sky grew black, he could not see nor feel the sun, his will and his strength went out from him into “the void of midnight !” He had no wish nor power to live ; his senses were benumbed by the stunning weight that had fallen upon him. Since the fire flew from his eyes beneath the shock no more light had come. His senses would not go out to things of sense again ! He was weary, and could not get up ; he felt drawn downwards as if through the bed and through the floor towards the embrace of earth ! her cold bosom would be soothing to his tired and fevered limbs ! Ah, piteous fate ! The wife of his youth, whom he had loved with such a steadfast love, transfixed—those fair and delicate daughters, the spring flowers rooted in the deep strong soil of his heart, pale, drooping with the weight of tears ; that noble son, with his proud eagle-face bent low in stern and tearless sorrow ; that curly-headed artist-boy that sobs out wildly ; and the little one that wails, it knows not why. Sad scene ! Shall I ever forget its piteous and mournful details ? He died ! The strong man died ! and we who loved could but look on him with helpless moanings.

Oh, the curse of that proud and stricken widow, when poverty bore hard upon her helpless self and delicately-nurtured daughters and young boys. It did not fall scatheless upon the hoary villain’s head ! The stern and bitter curse of her eldest-born followed him in retribution, though he could never follow him in person ; for his fierce nature, which only “subscribed to

tender objects," was moved by the wail of the helpless to stay by them with his strength until they grew strong! To the earth's end he would have followed the wretch so soon as he dared to leave his poor mother; he had sworn it in the depths of his heart and soul, and he was not a man to forget friend or foe. But the just God, who had said "vengeance is mine," vindicated his own laws before this time came.

The facts, as they afterwards came to light, are about these: It appears that Columbus, or Kit, with his abject cunning, had at once, by a sympathetic intuition, detected through the indifferent seeming of his father the strong awakening of avarice in his nature, caused by the golden display made by his eldest son Bill P. on his return from Texas. Cunning Kit ministered to this, and on each return from his trading expeditions in that direction brought back stories more than confirmatory of what had fallen from his honester brother concerning the mineral wealth of this new country. The inordinate lust for gold which had for so many years been partially controlled and kept in subjection by the "duties, rules, observances" of his social position now, fostered subtly, broke forth like a deeply-smouldered fire, to flame along the hell-charred surface of passions that seemed to have long ago gone out. All "the sacrednesses," beneath the sanctified restraints of which his devilish nature had so long evidently chafed with the silent endurance of great strength, now burnt out, like tinder before the lurid flash of this infernal fire. His mind and his passions glowed at once with the red, baleful heat! He was unhumanized in such a hideous way that nothing human could realize him; hence the impossibility for his friends to understand his motives. They could not realize that he now deliberately purposed to go to this golden land, with all the wealth he could carry thither, to add to the countless hoards that he should be thus enabled to collect there, that might build him a shining palace to his god, Momus, and all the hideous, unholy passions that are attendants on his train, with whom the fierce decadence of his life might be subsided in the hot and horrid orgies of unnatural lust! No; they could not realize all this in that calm, placid, and unhurried bearing. They could not realize that the snow upon his head cooled down the

crust of volcanic brain, while he went on to plot the defrauding of one brother's orphan in his charge, by sending her property out of the country under false pretences ; to plot the murder of another brother, because he was directing public attention to this purpose, and do that murder coolly in the public streets ; to draw from time to time upon the capital of his mercantile house until he had abstracted every cent, not only of his own share, but as well that of his nearest and dearest friend—that faithful partner, who had stood by him so long and trustingly ; to desert the wife of his first and earliest choice, who had borne him eighteen children, and been the ever loving, patient, wise, and thrifty helpmate of forty years, without the slightest provision for her support and that of her young and helpless family ; and resist appeal after appeal that reached him, either to send for her, or release her and *his* young children from a dependence upon the charity of those he had most deeply wronged. No, I say, they could not realize all this, but yet it proved to be so, every word of it.

Whether the monster ever realized his horrid dreams of golden magnificence in any degree through those indefinite and impenetrable regions said to be gold bearing, or otherwise, I am not fully prepared to say ; but it is certain that he possessed and settled an immense plantation on the Brazos, a few miles back from Columbus or Brazoria, where, for a number of years, he realized all that his devilish avarice would demand in the way of legitimate production from the soil in cultivating the long, fine fibred, and gigantic cotton of that region.

When the Texas revolution came on he consistently acted the traitor to save his ill-gotten wealth, and was treated with contempt by the stern and chivalric men who really led that movement. Houston was a mere man of straw, as he has been throughout his life ; but even he could not help cursing with corn-whiskey pathos, the treacherous planter who buried his weapons, his available property, and his gold, for fear they should be used by the Texan patriots against the Mexican power, which he favored. But, the struggle past, this fact was not forgotten, though passed over.

The Model Citizen now went on for several years rejoicing in

his strength, and swiftly accumulating riches, when there came to be, through negotiation, an arrangement between the sovereign State of Texas and the confederated Union, by which such debts incurred before running away to Texas from the States, might be collected in Texas, on proper exchange of official certifications. Now came the time of vengeance. To escape his creditors at the East and in Kentucky, the wary villain was compelled to make over all his property to his precious and promising son Kit. The creditors were defrauded, but the pleasant part of it is, that Kit held on to this "conveyance in trust," and chose to interpret it literally, and the result was, that he gradually encroached upon his excellent father under the shield of this conveyance until at last he turned him bowed, broken, and sick to death with the protracted struggle, out of the plantation house into the open air, and left him entirely to the mercenary sympathies of the coarse and lecherous mulatto slaves who had formed his Harem heretofore.

They took him to a distant hovel on the outskirts of the plantation, and there they so tormented him with the hellish provocations of unnatural lust, that to this day it remains uncertain whether they starved the hideous wretch to death, or wore out his life in monstrous tortures; certain it is that when they came back to the worthy son with the news of his father's death he coolly rewarded them, and when I visited him years afterwards these slaves still ranked as the aristocratic families of the plantation!

God had avenged his outraged laws!—the abused and neglected father—the deserted wife—the beggared orphan—the murdered brother—the ruined and broken-hearted friend—all—all had been avenged! and his own son too—the low and sneaking villain, had been the instrument of retribution! How sublime the justice!—he too in turn is made to realize what he had taught his own hoary-headed father.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child."

Ah, what a horrid death it was! Starved and taunted by the brutal creatures of his own senile lusts thus turned upon him! I have been much happier since I heard this fearful story; it has strengthened my faith in God. I walk the earth with a calmer feeling of confidence, and hope, and trust; for

now I know that even here, in this life, he will not permit his laws to be too hideously outraged with impunity. And now, too, that I have given all these facts to the public, do I breathe more freely ; they weighed upon me like a guilty conscience, while I remained silent, and I felt irresistibly impelled, even at the risk of being charged with irrelevancy, to dedicate these monsters to the world's scorn. I feel better now.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

It matters not to explain how or why, when I reached manhood, I came to go to Texas. If the general cause is not already sufficiently explained, it is very certain that I cannot take the time now to do it. Suffice it that I did go, and that I must now translate myself to the Frontier to take up the thread of my narrative. The following details, written at another period of my life, must come in to fill the necessary interval between what is now written and that when the more immediate purpose of the book is resumed.

Now the career of this same Bill P., who is earliest mentioned as having been the first to return from adventurings in Texas to my native town, and my own, come again into connexion under very different circumstances. I was alone on my way to San Antonio, before reaching which, some eighteen miles, I expected to find the Rancho of this man now promoted, through hard-earned honors, of the bloodiest battles of the Texan Revolution, to a colonelcy by Houston.

Many a time in the twilight had I sat upon the steps of his father's mansion, and listened in breathless eagerness to his curious tales!—for all about Gold mines, Mexicans, and Southern Indians was, as we have said, vague to us then. Much of our restless passion for adventure took its origin, and grew into our life, under the stimuli of these strange stories of his. Now that I found myself, after infinite vicissitudes, approaching the house of this man who had exerted so strong an influence upon my boyish imagination, I unconsciously began recurring to the child

ish conjurations his recitals had called up. What fantastic images were they which then sometimes filled my heated fancy, of a country where such scenes could occur—of a people capable of deeds so savage as he described! I recalled those pictures vividly enough now, for here was the reality to contrast them with. The lights and shadows were strong and deep, in good earnest, which had composed them—and it was amusing to compare them with the truth around me. Then in morbid moods I had before me a dim twilight region of prairies waving with dark-colored poisonous flowers; rocks that glittered with veins of gold, gaping in ravines; and vast arid plains piled around with shaggy hills, with bronzed, gaunt figures, bloody and fierce, gliding to and fro; while the red gleam of fire showed now and then the work of death they revelled in, lighting up the hideous, grim, and grotesque action of their ferocious joy: and now, I could not help smiling, as I lifted my eyes to look around upon as beaming and cheerful a landscape as ever the clear sunlight flooded.

It was the very ideal of harmonious repose—silence audible in beauty—where all the pulsings of great Nature seemed to be chordant with, and led by the loud throb of my own heart. Though it was January, the scene was surprisingly pleasant; the rolling prairie I traversed was relieved of monotony by little islands, or motts, as they are called, of the evergreen live oak, scattered clustering here and there. The grass, though slightly browned, was just sufficiently so to afford a sober contrast to the intense glistening green of the oak leaves, whose tints were heightened by the silvery frost-work of long moss, which set them off. The air was of that peculiar transparency Italy boasts, and seemed to be light itself, not a medium—while through it the herds of deer, though a mile off, were defined with startling minuteness, even to the detail of their careless repose, or the gestures of surprise in the pricked ear and quick stamp of a fine foot upon the sod, and hasty grouping, as the stranger came in view. The tall snowy cranes gesticulated, with lithe thin necks, their wonder, and stalked with slow stately steps towards each other; seeming, as they clustered on the ridge of the prairie undulations, to be weaving strange figures against the sky, with their restless necks crossing, as they ejaculated their

odd solemn croak. The sand-rats, their tails stuck straight in the air with fright, shot into their burrows, and then turned round, poking their striped noses out to peep. The little grass-sparrow flitted with a sharp chirp before me, while the sagacious hawk, which had been floating over head all the morning, watching till I should frighten up these little gentry, would dip, with a quick sough of wings, at the doubly-frighted wretch, which would drop like a stone in the long grass. This calm life—it was delicious !

The many pleasant sights and pleasant sounds—the bright and gay repose of being—they sank into and pervaded my whole life with an exquisite sense of joy and peace. Nature's God, in this most glorious woof

“ Of the garment that we know him by,”

stood revealed in everything,

———“ From the small breath
Of all new buds unfolding—from the meaning
Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening
Of April meadows,”—

here was a holy revelation that filled me with love and worship.

I could not realize that this soft picture had ever been, or could ever be, defaced by those harsh discords the fatal spirit of humanity carries with it always. But a little time was to illustrate to my experience that, indeed, “ we know not what a day may bring forth”—that even in this wide merry sunshine, in these cool delightful shadows, Death and Fear could show their ghastly faces—that, “ alternating Elysian brightness with deep and dreadful night,” life everywhere, in cities and on plains, whirls on the same.

This man, whose house I was approaching, was to exhibit to me a new phase of character. Nurtured in civilization, he had abjured the brotherhood of community as tame and sickly, wedding himself, body and soul, to ferocious strife. So strangely had the unnatural circumstances of his position operated upon his temper, that life itself was no longer a pleasant consciousness to

him, without the eternal necessity of struggling with death in a hundred forms, and the half savage exultation of the thought that he purchased from hour to hour, his right to live, with his own prompt heart and steady arm. I myself had begun to feel something of that haughty swelling of the veins—that answering of the heart, in hot flushings to the brow—which familiarity with danger, and the necessity of self-reliance produces ; and I felt a sort of yearning to trace in this man, whom I remembered with the freshness of my own present age upon him, the stern lines of these new feelings, legitimately hardened and deepened by the habit of many years.

The faint trail I had been following now brought me suddenly upon rather a fine scene—a “bottom prairie,” as it is termed, sloped from the last undulation of the upland on which I stood down to the banks of the San Antonio river. The mesquit-grass, covering this basin, was a fresher green than the upland grass ; while the mesquit-timber, a gnarled and scrubby growth, differed much from the grand live oak, and was destitute of moss. Facing me, and on the immediate bank of the river, were three stockade-houses, or lesser “ranchos.”

I rode up to the middle one, conscious that there was something about it, I could not tell what, that attracted me as bearing a more American air. I was not disappointed ; a white man came to the door. It could be no one but Col. P. ; but little altered. As I climbed the five or six blocks which served for mounting the picket, and advanced to his door, I had time for a good look, and to recall the past. He was the same thick-set, uncouthly-gaited, burly-looking monster ; the great brush of fiery hair standing out “horrent” above a face, the skin of which seemed now to be one entire dark freckle, except where the paler seam of that large scar marked it across the cheek. His eye, a whity-grey, was cordial enough in its expression, and so was the bear-squeeze of his huge hand ; but there was a peculiarity about his lips I instantly remembered—they were so stiff and double as to render it impossible for him to smile easily, and the abortive grin he got up conveyed no expression of pleasantness, but only reminded me of a mastiff over a bone.

Since my boyhood I have the same instinctive aversion to

men who laugh in pain—from whom joy comes forth in travail. That had been one cause of my hatred to him then. There was no time for analysing instincts ; for, as soon as I made myself known, the colonel dragged me into the house, pouring out a string of his sort of welcomes—exclamations of surprise, and questions—“What the *devil* brought you all the way out here by yourself? You’ve chawed the apron-string like a wolf’s cub, I see, and cut! I thought, my youngster, when you used to sit with your chops stretched, listening to me that time I went in to the States, talk about Gold mines and Indians, you meant to give the old ones trouble some day! Didn’t come all the way by yourself?” looking fixedly at me. “Didn’t you see the Comanches? wan’t you scared some? Rubbed off the gooseberry by this time! done chawing salad, aint you? But what brought you here? cut a stick, eh! left in a jiffy?”

“No, no!” said I; “old fellow, stop! and I’ll tell you. It was that same love of deviltry and dislike of the babyisms of home which made you leave it, that has sent me here now! I came to see some fun! I am tired of the tame way they live in Kentucky?”

“Like you all the better! Fudge! who’d live on pap always? Give you man’s meat here: rough country, rough doings, but it *does* make men! We live, sure enough, here! No sickening squirts can come it out here! Lord! what would a spindle-legged, strapped thing, coateed and cloth’d, do here, where we have a skrimmage every week? First Mexicans, then Indians, come on. Brush the Yellow-Bellies. Then the Copperheads come sneaking down. They kill my horses, the villains! kill my hogs. Just about rows enough going on to keep a man’s blood up, and practice plumb. Get the green out of your eye as quick as you can, and I’ll make a good shot of you. We call it good shooting when they don’t kick! Did a sweet thing the other day, over yonder by some deep gullies. Had missed a hog every week or so—suspected some of those straggling thieves of Mexicans. Was sitting at the door one evening, fixin’ up ‘sixshooter,’ and I saw a streak of smoke over there among the trees. Thinks I, maybe that’s another hog. So I travelled over there, Indian fashion; and there they were—two ragged Yellow-Bellies—happy as lords,

while they cut up my white sow. Their fire was right on the edge of the gully, and they looked like two monkeys in a tickling match, they were so happy. Thinks I, mighty pleasant surprise I'll give you. Bang! One tumbled over stiff—for I hit the back of his head; and the other—I think I laughed out loud, it was done so quick! Did you ever see a turtle slide off a slick rock where he had been sunning? or a spring-frog take the mud? I tell you it was nothing to the way that Mexican flirted himself off the bank into the gully. It beat all the quick fingering I ever saw. By the time I got there he was out of sight, for these gullies are fifty feet deep, some of 'em, and very twistifying. I took the flint and steel out of the dead one's pocket—they never have anything else worth taking—kicked out the chunks, and took up my hog, and left him there for the wolves."

So he rattled on, stringing incident upon incident of his wild life with a ferocious sort of gusto, that—full of the spirit of such scenes as I imagined I was—I could not help acknowledging to myself a sort of cold revulsion creeping upon me—a chill shudder, as I recognised in his rattling, rambling talk, the character of incidents which were to make up the ideal of "fun" I had foolishly risked so much to realize. There was brutality rather than the expected romance in it all.

But as dinner now made its appearance, I had no leisure for further cogitation. I had made the plunge, and "sink or swim, live or die," came back to me from school-boy days. Our frontier meal of beef, sauced with appetite and the "grease" of fried pork, and seasoned to scalding heat with "chile," with milk to neutralize its blistering effects upon our throats, and thin Mexican cakes, called "tortillias," was brought in by the colonel's Mexican "woman." She was his *fifth*—for he only kept them so long as it suited his most autocratic pleasure—and was rather pretty, with Indian features, olive complexion, and coarse black hair; her large black eye wearing that bright animal flash upon the iris peculiar to the lower orders of Southern women. She seemed very good-natured and humble, and obeyed her despot as though she were a part of the "joints and motives" of his body, and equally subject to his will.

Two Peons—the lowest grade of Mexican population, and

slaves to the right of life and limb—made up what remained of the household, except an old crone, mother of the “woman,” whom I had scarcely noticed, crouched with those same animal eyes, undimmed, gleaming from a dark corner of the room. They all waited at a respectful distance until we got through; and straightway, before we were fairly seated in the other room—I on a buffalo robe, the colonel on a stool—the tongues of the quartette were suddenly loosed in a torrent of gibberish; the keynote carried in a loud, insolent tone by one of the Peons, a little, shrivelled, sharp-faced knave, whom I had noticed with difficulty restraining himself in our presence.

The colonel told me the fellow was “bragging.” “He’s the greatest coward that ever bent grass,” said he; “but he can brag the knot off a musquit limb, and that’s tough a little! But it’s the way with all the ‘Yellow-Bellies;’ they beat the world bragging, and let their women whip ‘em.”

We took a look at the premises. They were surrounded by a high picket-fence of mesquit logs, set on end as close as the timber would permit—including a cow-pen—and all about two acres. The house, a long square, built as the fence, except a plaster of moss and mud filling the interstices, and a covering of bulrushes. The colonel said his was like all the other small ranchos of the country—of which there were two in view, above and below us; one inhabited by a common “ranchero,” with his forty or fifty hangers-on, the other by a young American renegadé, who, though he had once been respectable, the colonel thought had disgraced himself, as he indignantly expressed it, “by marrying a dirty drab of a Mexican woman. Marry ‘em, indeed! To disgrace the name of Texan, and his family, by marrying the sluts!”

“Good,” said I, “Colonel; the holy Catholic Church had nothing to do in banns and fees between you and your five women, I suppose?” “Church, indeed! I trouble the pudding-paunched priests occasionally for a little ‘black mail,’ when they happen to trouble me by putting themselves across my way, but never about women.” “Frontier morals, Colonel?” “Yes!” (with one of those stiff grins), “‘we do as we dare’ here, and six-shooter is my license, certificate, and deed.” 1

learned further, that about a mile and a half up the river on the other side, was the Rancho of Madame Cavillo, on a much grander scale than these. "She is the most perfect old she-devil," said the Colonel, "that ever you heard of. There isn't a man or woman old enough in the whole country to more than guess at her age. She looks like an apple left on the tree all winter, in the face ; but I tell you, the Mexicans fear her worse than they do the priests. She's got the fire of seven thunder-snags in her yet—isn't afraid of anything but priests, and is very rich. She has seven thousand head of cattle and horses—nobody can tell how much land—or how many silver mines she owns, though she doesn't work them much ; and she has near five hundred Peons about her, too. She hates me, and is afraid of me. She's gone now to confessional across the Rio Grande—she does this once a year to wash the blood off. She takes two or three hundred men for a guard. I think she will be back in a day or two, and she will give a grand Fandango—always does this when she returns. I shall have fun, if this cursed nephew of her's, Agatone, doesn't return."

His expression of gossiping good-humor changed to one of singular ferocity as he mentioned that name. Suspecting something in the wind, I inquired further. "Who is this Agatone?" "He commands a band of fifty or sixty cut-throats, who are always stealing and murdering from here to the Rio Grande. The little shrivelled villain ! (from between his set teeth) I owe him a few good turns. He has been trying a long time to assassinate me—ha ! ha ! ha !" And he doubled himself down in a sort of spasm in bringing forth this rasping laugh. "Ha ! ha ! ha ! it would have done yer stomach good to see me pick one of his men off that bluff !" pointing as he spoke to the steep bluff bank on the other side of the river.

"It was a good shot ! I was standing somewhere about here : you see the villains swam over during the night, and lay upon their bellies behind the low thorn bushes you see there at the bottom of the yard, waiting until I should come out in the morning. It happened I went to a fandango that night and danced until nearly day ; so as I did not make my appearance, about ten o'clock they began to think I was not at home, and

concluded to leave; just as they were jumping in to swim, my woman came to the door and saw them—she came yelling in to me. I had just awoke—sprang out with sixshooter in my hand—by the time I got here, one of them had reached the top, saw me and dodged. The other was scrambling in a hurry, catching, as he climbed, at the vines that hung over the bluff's edge—I let drive at him! ha! ha! it was beautiful to see him—first spring up—then let go—and kicking against the bluff leap right off in the air. Lord! what a yell he gave—and such a pretty face he made, I see it now turned towards me wrinkled with fright and hate as he went down into the water! Ooh!” sucking in his breath, “it was delicious! if it only had been Agatone, I should have fainted!” slapping me with a heavy hand, in his ecstasy, upon the shoulder—“My boy, ain't such things worth living for? ha!”

I can't say my assent to the Colonel's idea of the “greatest happiness principle,” was quite so much from the heart as he could have desired, but he pleased me; the excitement of loathing while I studied such a monster, from the very novelty of the thing, had a strange charm for me. This soul-moving relish of his in talking of death—this dwelling with fond appetite upon the revolting detail of cold murders, filled me with something like that restless half-pleasant awe, the ghost-stories, the “raw-head-and-bloody-bones” of winter-night legends, used to bring to my childhood.

It was perfectly new to me and astonishing, and I determined to study this man, and see more of the circumstances which could have so ossified his nature. After supper, he recurred for the first time to old associations and mutual friends.

Here I was again stumped, for my reading and experience heretofore had taught me, and I certainly expected to find no exception in this case—that no man, however monstrous the development of his passions, however hardened and distorted, would be found insensible to the gentle memories of innocence, and childhood, and early love; that these ever loved, fresh and gentle wooers, these spring airs of the desert past would always find in the scathed soil some germ with life enough to wake in bloom.

I had always clung by this, for it is a pretty and hopeful sentiment; but in this man I could see not the slightest emotion, while I eagerly tried to call it out, in dwelling upon homestead scenes—on a mother, sisters, faithful friends—aye! even the old love—and there I hoped I saw some lighting up, but it was faint: the same coarse, careless tone being resumed, in an instant, after a slight quaver of what might have been called tenderness.

Had there been any necessity for the man's acting a part with me, I should not have been surprised at this insensibility, but there was not the slightest; he never dreamed of "acting" in his life—he was too stolid and coarse for that, and indeed evidently wearying of the subject, he turned off and brought out the darling of his heart, "six-shooter," and then all his soul came into his manner at once, as he dilated upon her merits—the wonderful feats accomplished by her in his hands and those of others.

Soon after, in spite of all the novelty and excitement of the circumstances I found myself surrounded by, I was coiled upon my buffalo-robe and sound asleep.

The next day a young Texan whom I had known in the settlements came out to join us. He had waited in Bexar to hear some positive news of a negro boy, to recover whom as a runaway from the plantation on the Brazos, he had come out to Bexar. The boy had been taken in that neighborhood, and made his escape in a very daring manner. Some Mexican traders came in, who reported him safe enough on the other side of the Rio Grande. The Texan had never seen a Comanche fight, though familiar enough with fights of every other character. He looked forward to one as to the pleasant realization of a long-anticipated joy, and even the savor of the smoking dinner the "woman" had prepared, seemed only to share his attention while he eagerly questioned the Colonel as to the probability of seeing one. "Oh!" said he, "you need not be in a fidget, for if you stay here many days, I promise you shall have enough to stay your stomach." During the evening the by-play of several characteristic and amusing adventures occurred, but we must defer them to the more important action of our narrative.

The next morning, while we were discussing breakfast, Antone

came rushing in, his copper face a creamy white from fear, screaming, "Los Indios! Los Indios!" The Colonel turned over the board table as he sprang for "six-shooter," leading the way for the stiles. There was a long train of cavalry in sight, with banners flying, very slowly descending into our little "bottom prairie."

The moment the Colonel saw them, without saying a word, he turned and launched a furious kick at the ill-starred Antone, which sent him a somerset off the blocks. "What's the matter, Colonel?" "The cowardly blackguard," growled he, "to come bleating 'Los Indios!' and getting a man's stomach up for a fight, when it's nobody but Madame Cavillo and her curs, whom one has no fair excuse for shooting at! Faugh! I shan't be able to finish my breakfast. The white-livered calf!" I had felt my heart jump to my throat at the sight of the troop, for my eye was not yet sufficiently trained in making those prompt distinctions frontier life render necessary, or, in the Colonel's words, "the green was not out of it yet," for I certainly thought they were Comanches, and had begun to experience that all-overish sort of sensation—that curious mixture of choking eagerness, curiosity, and half-conscious dread which the near approach of certain battle brings to every one; and the truth is, if it must be confessed, a very considerable feeling of relief as of oppression taken from my lungs, when I heard the Colonel's explanation.

The Texan, though, whose associations had given something of a braggadocio tone to his character, delighted the Colonel by chiming in with his abuse of the unfortunate Peon, and making boisterous demonstrations of a disposition to wreak his disappointment too, after the same fashion, upon the wretch's already black and blue body; but he suddenly recovered his nimbleness, and took himself off, grumbling that "Los Indios" might cut all their throats next time, and he'd neither give the alarm, nor, what was still more dire, bring his puissant arm to their defence. "Garracho!"

The troop passed near enough for us to see the old dame herself indistinctly. She was a squatty figure—seemed very old—and was borne in a sort of litter, carried by four horsemen, who

appeared most obsequiously careful not to jostle her dangerous repose. Her followers were most of them dressed in white cotton pants—the full sailor fashion ; and wore no coats—the “serape” or blanket-cloak, of varied and gaudy colors, answering, as it always does, in place of that garment. They carried long, rusty muskets on their shoulders, and wore their cast-iron “Toledo” under the left thigh, next the saddle—“a curious place to wear the sword, by-the-by,” said I to the Colonel. “Oh,” he answered, “it’s well enough to keep such a miserable frog-sticker where it can’t be got at ; bad as it is, they might be expected to use it sometimes, if they wore it any other way. The only use they ever make of their long swords is to cut up game—this they do with amazing dexterity. If you first kill a bear or deer, a Mexican will unhinge it for you so quick with that awkward hackle, you can hardly realize that it is done.”

There were a few dirty streamers bearing Romish devices, flaunting in the breeze above the old woman. They had now reached the Mexican rancho above us, and halted for an instant opposite, to return salutes. It had not pleased her despotic humor to do us that honor, for which there was at least one very good reason—that we had not made the overture. For between her and the Colonel there was that smothered, snarling civility, that you see between two great bull-dogs, who having been compelled to meet, after a deliberate survey of each other’s proportions, come to the conclusion that nothing is to be gained by a fight, and merely uncover their teeth to show they are not afraid, and pass on, looking back and growling louder as they get more space between them.

But they made up for our silence at the other rancho. The shouts of men, women, children, and barking of “mongrel whelps of low degree”—and every other degree, indeed—joined with the cracking and squibbing of bad powder and worse guns, made up the sort of “jubilee of discord” the Mexicans delight in, as the expression both of joy and grief. And, of a truth, it would have been hard to tell which was meant to be exhibited in this case ; for it is very certain they would have made the same demonstration, had it been the scalp of the old Senora the cavalcade

were bringing home. The only question is, whether the rejoicing of their gratified hate would have been more sincere in that case, than the rejoicing of their stomachs now in anticipation of the expected feast and "fandango," which was to celebrate her arrival.

This idea served to bring to the Colonel some consolation for his bitter disappointment in a "Fight." "We shall have it about three nights from this," said he, "and such a feast of chickerones, coffee-drinking, and general-up-side-down, and 'turn your partners' of a cavaulting match you never heard of, as it will be." "Good as grass-burrs," said the Texan, "I'm there." "But what do you mean by a 'feast of chickerones,' and by 'grass-burrs?'" said I.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Colonel, "you're a perfect pea-vine yet—you're so tender and green! Poor fellow! don't know what a chickerone-feast is? Better not go to buffalo range yet—couldn't make the old bulls believe there was any harm in you; they'd all take after you to get a juicy bite; you'd be eaten up—lock, stock, and barrel! Why, man, chickerones are cracklings, and are one of the greatest delicacies the Mexicans know! When they kill a hog, they cut him up in small pieces; boil them for the lard until they are crisp; then strain and let 'em get cold, and they wouldn't give a handful of them for all the *figur-ee'd* sweetnin' doings they have at a ball in New Orleans. The old woman always has 'em by tubfulls at her Fandangos; and a Mexican with a fist full of these, a tin cup full of coffee, and a 'tortillia,' is too happy to brag even; and as for grass-burrs—if you hadn't on them thick boots, you'd have learnt what they were quick enough in this 'bottom.' I think them boots are spoiling you—they're interfering with your education; you'd better give 'em to me. Come, off with 'em, my boy; you're from old Kentuck; I feel an interest in having you learn fast; moccasins are good enough to commence life with. You'll have to *feel* your way then, and you'll be sure to know it next time."

I had noticed the Colonel casting longing eyes upon my stout double-soled waterproofs, and concluded it would be just as well to propitiate him by making a surrender at once; so I told him

he should have them so soon as he would procure me a stout pair of moccasins. And off he went to get them, forgetting he had not told me what grass-burrs weré; but I soon learnt, to my heart's content.

CHAPTER VII.

. "FEELING" THE WAY.

THE next morning, at daybreak, stretched upon my buffalo-robe, on the floor, I was indulging in a pleasant dreamy sort of snooze, half asleep and half awake, conscious, to some degree, of what was going on about me—for I heard the Texan and the Colonel get up and go out, and the Mexicans were sauntering about the room. But yet I had not opened my eyes; for delightful images were glancing to and fro inside the lids—home, and pleasant faces of those I loved—and, somehow or other, I knew if I opened them all these must disappear, and disagreeable realities would take their places. But, gramercy! I opened them quick enough as the Colonel came bouncing into the house followed by the Texan, and the Mexican women screamed that infernal cry of "Los Indios!"

I turned over lazily on my couch, and asked, in a careless tone—for I was anxious not to appear green—"Another of Antone's alarms, I suppose, Colonel?" "No! by blood! boy, it's in earnest this time!" dragging down "six-shooter." "Up with you, if you want to save your horse and see the fun!" There was a savage glee in the man's face as he said this, which convinced me there was something to pay this time; and as he and the Texan rushed out, I sprang to my feet.

"My gun! where is it?" just occurred to me—"that cursed Antone!" I bolted out of the front door; he was climbing the steps, with my gun in his hand; two or three long strides, I had reached them; I mounted; there he was below me, the gun to his face, aimed towards the zenith. He fired away—"Garracho!

Los Indios ! Garra—" I broke into his expletives just there, as he was in the act of firing the other barrel, with a blow on the side of his head that sent him reeling. Jerking my gun from his hands, I started at full speed after the Colonel and the Texan, who had a hundred yards the start of me.

The morning was misty, and, about four or five hundred yards off, I could see, indistinctly, men on horseback, galloping to and fro. This was the enemy, nearly a quarter of a mile off, whom the stupid wretch of a Peon had wasted one of my precious loads at—or, rather, at the place where the moon might have been. Behind me were the dismal yells of the Mexican women and men ; before me the terrible war-whoop of the Comanches—a most uncouth and indescribable sound. The mist brooded very low, and I could only distinguish ahead, as I strained every nerve to catch up with my friends, a hurrying crowd of horses without riders, and mules and horses, with riders—dark, half-naked men, with long lances, plunging here and there—all " confusion worse confounded," into a whirling, rushing mass.

The Colonel and Texan stopped, side by side, about three hundred yards from our starting point ; and, as I joined them almost at the same instant, I saw there was an excellently good reason for it. A party of eight Comanche warriors had suddenly wheeled from out this chaos I have described, and, with a simultaneous burst of that infernal whoop, came thundering on at full speed, as if they intended to ride us down.

"Steady, boys !" said the Colonel ; " wait till they get in about thirty paces, and then choose your man !" On they came ; they were tall, lean, sinewy men, with dark bronzed skins—naked, except the breech-clout and a cape of buffalo-robe over the shoulders ; their long hair, done into plats with a bunch of rich feathers tied to them, was streaming on the air behind—while the chief, who led, was distinguished by his crown of eagle feathers, and an appendage, some two yards in length, of gaudy colored feathers, sailing out from its rear. They rode as if they and their pined and beautiful horses were one—some of them with their long lances in rest, just as the " Peers of Charlemagne" must have carried them—others clashing them against their broad white oval shields of buffalo hide, folded many times—holding their bows

strung in the same hand—while the feathered tips of the full quiver showed above the left shoulder. Howling yet more terribly, they were nearly within the thirty paces—still the same headlong gait.

Our little platoon was levelled—quicker than thought they wheeled—we fired—down went the horse of the chief upon his knees—a clear cavaulet into the air, that mighty personage was thrown, his eagle-feathered crown sailing one way, he another. But he lit upon his feet, and, with inconceivable agility, sprang upon his horse again and followed his retreating warriors. I was nearest to him, and rushed at him ; but he was too nimble for me. I might have shot him—but, fury ! that contemptible coward ! my other load was gone. I had no time, however, for regrets. After galloping back a short distance—stooping at the same time behind the bodies of their horses, to avoid our shot—they charged in the same way again, and were received by the Colonel and Texan with another broadside. I was loading my gun as fast as possible—I had snatched up the powder-horn as I ran out of the house, not seeing the shot-bag, which I discovered round the *waist* of the beastly Peon, and had not time to disengage it.

The Texan, like myself, in the flurry had secured only part of his ammunition, which was fortunately the shot-bag ; so we made a hasty exchange. I poured the shot down without measuring ; now for a cap ; I felt for my pocket where they were usually carried—Oh, curses ! I discovered for the first time that I had on nothing but my drawers and shirt, and was in my bare feet to boot ! Pleasant predicament this—three hundred yards from the house—no caps to fire with, and those infernal devils determined to have our scalps. “Texas, have you got any caps ?” “No, d—n it ! Yes, here’s one,” taking it from his pocket. I snatched it eagerly, and was just in time, for the Comanches—by this time reduced to six, as two of them, evidently severely hurt, were supporting each other off the field—came rushing upon us again with louder whoops and greater confidence than ever ; for they were accustomed to the double-barrel guns, and thought they were sure of us now, as our charges were out.

So on they came this time within about twenty paces, turning

loose their arrows at us, one of which I felt slide through the muscles of my arm, and a sharp imprecation from the Texan told that he too had been pricked. The Colonel stood unmoved, reminding me of FitzJames :

“ This rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I ! ”

One fierce tawny rascal was standing erect in his stirrup, as he came on, in the very act of launching his spear at him, when the cool veteran deliberately drew a bead upon him, and fired. The warrior reeled—it struck him on the naked ribs, and I saw the big red stream bubble out as he wheeled, and, galloping back some fifty paces, pitched head-foremost from his horse.

“ That fellow’s got it, anyhow ! See, his lance did not reach me ! ” said the Colonel, between a shout and a laugh. There was the lance, sure enough, still quivering, a few paces in front of him. But it was no laughing matter to the Texan and myself, for, after a great deal of swearing, he had finally convinced himself that he had given me the only cap he had. He, too, had left his ! A pretty scrape our hurry had got us into : loads in our guns, and no caps to fire them with !

A reinforcement from the main body had met the retreating Comanches. The one who had fallen had turned himself upon his back, and holding up his arms, a mounted warrior galloping on each side of him had seized them, and they were dragging him between them towards the main body, who were still bent on herding together, and driving off our horses and mules.

These two parties had been sent with the charitable design of taking our scalps while we were robbed of our horses. Emboldened by the reinforcement, in an inconceivably short time they were charging upon us again, with still greater fury from the sight of their wounded braves, several of whom were still in the party, as I could tell from the blood smeared upon their limbs.

It was an awful moment, as that grim, hideous crowd came rushing on to overwhelm us. inevitably, as it seemed to me. What could we do ? The Texan and myself were “ hors du combat.” The Colonel had only two more loads ! We clubbed

our guns in desperation. The Colonel coolly stepped out in front of us. He did not let them get so close this time. He fired. They all stopped short. The foremost man, with a quick movement, dropped his bow and clapped his hand upon his side, the other hand pointing with his lance at the Colonel ; he looked back, speaking very loudly and rapidly to his friends. The Colonel fired his last and sixth shot, without taking his gun from his face. A warrior sprang up, convulsively, from his saddle. The whole party, shaking their lances in the air, with the most unearthly yell it was ever my fortune to hear, scattered as if a grenade had exploded among them. Throwing their weapons from them, and bending low over their horses' necks, they plied heels and arms, urging them on with frantic energy—and, as far as I could hear, their hoarse voices were repeating the same word (a strange sound, of which I can give no idea in our letters), which the Colonel said meant "The Conjuror."

"Hurrah for 'six-shooter,' " said the Colonel, patting the piece affectionately ; "Howel's game over again ; she saved our scalps, certain !" and running eagerly to the Comanche, who had fallen from his horse, and was feebly endeavoring to drag himself erect again by the help of a stout shrub, he drew his knife, and throwing himself upon the bleeding wretch, planted some half-dozen stabs in his body, and then, as if the blood upon his hand had entirely maddened him—forgetting he had no other load in his gun—he set off at a tremendous rate, in pursuit of the retreating Indians.

This was downright lunacy. He shouted to us to come on, but I answered, "In the name of common sense, what good can we do, but lose our scalps if they should turn at bay ? we've got nothing to shoot with—we are throwing away our lives stupidly ! Let's go back and get our caps, and you your other cylinder, and then follow them."

I had as well undertaken to remonstrate with a starved tiger, that had taken one lap of warm blood. He kept on at the top of his speed, shaking the bloody knife over his head, and hoarsely shouting, "Come on if you are not a coward !" Had I been a little older, I should not have regarded this taunt ; but as it was, it stung me to the quick ; and though, at every step, the grass-

burrs I was to "learn about in this bottom" were touching me to the quick too, through the bare soles of my feet, I kept shouting on after this roused and frantic wild beast of a man.

In this silly race, we had soon left the house half a mile in the rear, and nothing but the desperate fright of the Indians, at the conjuration of shooting six times, saved us from being slaughtered like three blind brutes. When we mounted to the upland prairie, we paused. Crazy as the Colonel was, he perceived the enemy were out of our reach. A half-mile off, on an opposite ridge, we saw the main body had halted. They were very coolly transferring their saddles from their own horses to our fine "American" animals, while the party who had been engaged in the attack upon us were still going at full speed, in every direction, over the wide plain.

The party on the hill seemed, from their gestures, to be very much astonished at this manœuvre; and after taking a long look at their flying comrades, sprang upon their horses, and urging their ill-gotten booty into a run, were soon out of sight behind the ridge.

I had thrown myself upon the grass, utterly exhausted, so soon as I had joined the Colonel, and an examination of my poor feet proved to me most conclusively, that what he had said about my never forgetting my way when I had once *felt* it, was most true; for never shall I forget that race, and those grass-burrs. They are vile triangular seeds of the grass, hard as pebbles; each of the corners armed with a keen thorn. The ground is thickly strewn with them, and at every step I had taken, a half-dozen or so had been imbedded in my skin, "like quills upon the fretful porcupine," on a small scale at least; they showed their serried heads, thick as they could stand, all over the cushions of my heels and toes, and such blistering torture as it cost me, is inconceivable.

The Colonel was coughing violently, bringing up large clots of blood. I thought at first he had ruptured an important blood-vessel, and was half inclined, in my spleen, to be rejoiced at it, since his stupid ferocity had brought about all this torture of mine—for it was as bad as walking over coals, and I shrank as from a hot ordeal from the idea of walking back to the house—and had

almost endangered his own life by his mole-eyed and headlong fury. I was more than half consoled as I saw him spitting the red foam from his lips. But this was nothing to the real peril he had exposed all our lives to. I felt no sort of pity for him as I saw him sink pale and frightened on the grass—for this fierce animal, though while the glow was on him he was a very fiend in battle, yet shrank with deeper appalment from death in any other form, than even timid men would have done.

The Texan was blowing like a porpoise—swearing now at his own carelessness and mine in forgetting the caps and spoiling his fun; and then, grinding his teeth, and stamping about in impotent rage, as he saw a tall warrior mounted upon his horse, and dashing him to and fro on the ridge, seemingly for our benefit, and to try his gait. I thought he would go into a fit. As the Indian galloped off, he shook his clenched fist, and howled imprecations and threats after him.

The Colonel recovered his spirits as the blood ceased to rise, and springing to his feet as the pleasant conviction came to his relief, that he was not born to die so unmartial a death, insisted that we should return instantly and try if we couldn't raise horses at the Mexican Ranchos above us, to pursue the Indians. "They have carried off all that were loose on the prairie," said he, "but the Mexicans generally keep their best riding horses inside the picketing, and we were fools for not keeping ours there!"

I saw the torturing walk was not to be avoided by simply dreading it, so I girded up my loins and off we started—the Colonel rallying us all the way most unmercifully for our ridiculous verdancy, in coming off without our ammunition. Had there been any buoyancy left in me, I might have retorted emphatically the charge of verdancy upon his preposterous helter-skelter sally;—but my poor, suffering feet, now that a revulsion of excitement had come on, engrossed all my attention.

Just think of walking a half-mile with naked feet over pin points, and you may form some faint idea of how entire the abstraction and pre-occupation of my wits must have been—though, strictly speaking, not gone "a wool gathering," it was much more sprightly employment, that—marking the sharp pang as each particular thorn pierced to the quick.

Adam, in his fig-leaved innocence, making his first experimental acquaintance with a "Hornpipe," in a casual introduction to a "Yellow-jacket's nest," could have made no more vivid display of "gymnastics" on the "light fantastic toe," than I did through that weary distance. Now, I would select a thick, cool, green-looking tuft of grass. Ah! that will be a pleasant cushion for my burning soles! and the spring I would make to reach it would only drive the prickles in deeper. Now the tumulus above the burrow of a sand-rat promised at least to be crumbling and soft. That's the bright thought! They won't at least go so deep. So with a hop, skip, and jump, my feet would sink in two or three little pyramids—fire and stings! worse than ever; over my instep up to my ancles, all the most delicate parts of the skin were pierced by multiplied red-hot points—wheugh! I fairly gasped as I brushed the big drops from my face! Is there no alleviation?

"Ah, those bare patches of sand that shimmer so merrily in the sun! There can't be any harm in them—they look so smooth and nice. The fairies, "Bonny little Folk," they swept them clean to be for stepping-stones across this gulf of "Needles," to such beguiled unfortunates as myself—bless the kind "wee people" from my heart! Another jump; curse the "Uncannie Fiends!" these infernal triangles were the sole invention of your ingenious malice! You hid the points there thick as the grains of sand to tempt me to my torture! I almost fancied I could hear the little villains clap their hands and shout in mocking glee! Oh, desperation! Setting my teeth with a surly grit of defiance at my imaginary tormentors, off I set at the top of my bent, regardless of everything but getting to the Ranch—not even stopping to decide whether the coarse neigh of laughter which followed me was an ebullition from the "Uncannie Fiends," or the Colonel and Texan!

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENEMY OVERTAKEN

THIS was by no means the last of my experience in "grass-burrs"—nor, indeed, was I free from it for weeks afterwards. When I arrived at the house I found it all deserted. The Mexican women, half frightened to death, had run down the back way to the river, and plunging in, swum across, led by valourous Antone, and all had scampered off to Madame Cavillo's Rancho.

When my two friends arrived they went to work forthwith to melting lead in an old iron spoon to mould bullets, while I, seated on a buffalo-rug, was digging away with a long needle to grub out some few at least of the most troublesome thorns from my feet, when a loud shout from the other side of the picket brought us all to the door.

The first object that met my view was the long sharp nose and shrivelled face of Sir Braggadocio Antone. The rascal was brandishing a rusty musket over his head, and pointing it in the direction the Indians had retreated, was rattling away a torrent of bloody threats and dire imprecations. What could it mean? He must have somebody to back him! and stepping out to mount the blocks, from which he nimbly retreated as he caught my angry eye, we saw his heroic talk was backed sure enough by about twenty Mexicans, pretty well mounted, and armed, as usual, with nondescript utensils that might have served to generate the mould in some "Old Curiosity Shop," of specimens of the progress of firearms since their invention.

As the enemy were by this time several miles off, they looked amazingly fierce—twirling their moustaches and slapping their

thighs with prodigious emphasis—every man, as soon as we came in view, setting out at the top of his voice, in an independent recitative of his individual claims to the character of a ferocious warrior, backing them with multiplied instances on this, that, and the other battle-field in which he had proven it to all the world by the most unheard-of deeds of valor.

But they were all obliged to succumb to Antone. He was in his glory—his loud, shrill, cracked voice gradually rose to the undisputed ascendant, the din and gabble around him subsiding into a breathless and open-mouthed attention, as, leaping into his saddle and spurring his horse into the execution of sundry lofty curvets in front of the valiant band, he launched into such an eloquent and voluble expatiation upon his own deeds of frantic heroism—his voice strained almost into a screech, one hand still whirling his musket over his head, and the other, when he could spare it from his bridle, sawing the air with such furious illustrative emphasis, that his peers were fairly overawed, and listened in respectful silence, their eyes dilated and mouths gaping in wonder at his terrific deeds and threats !

We three stood gazing at him for a moment in silence, which was broken by a shouting effort at a laugh from the Colonel, in which we both joined most heartily. The knave slunk back for a little time at this, while we jumped down among them and were instantly absorbed, every man for himself, in eagerly pleading and threatening, and offering bribes the most extravagant to these warriors, to be permitted a participation with them, through their horses, in the promised glories of the fight. But “nada !” “no, hai !” no ! no ! no ! they were too greedy of glory to share it ! too jealous of the honor of their fathers to permit the white man to dim the escutcheon they inherited by participation in dangers, they as guardians of the frontier were called upon to meet. Here Antone interposed again—

“Can we not ourselves exterminate the whole nation of Comanches ? What do we want with your help ? What will this insignificant band be in our hands ? We’ll sweep them down like a great wind ! You stay at home ! I’ll bring you back your horses ! I’ll bring you back a dozen scalps that I will take with my single ar——”

Here his oration was cut short by a heavy polt dealt him from the rear by the Texan, which nearly sent him from his saddle. He very suddenly placed thirty paces between himself and another such disagreeable parenthesis, and standing erect in his stirrups, without fear of interruption, kept on in a still louder voice.

The Texan was foaming—he offered them twenty times the value of their horses. “Nada!” “Ill give it to you then to take me up behind!” No answer. “Curse you yellow-bellied villains, I’ve a great notion to shoot you from your saddles and take your horses anyhow!”

This threat he looked so capable of putting into execution, that these doughty champions of the glory of the Montezumas thought it best to get out of his way, and as the Indians were no doubt by this time too far off to be caught, there was less danger in that direction. Off they hurried, leaving us in no enviable mood.

The Texan was about to fire his gun after them, but I knocked it up. He and the Colonel then started in a long trot, determined to be in at the fight at any rate. These two wild beasts seemed to have no sort of idea what common sense or common prudence meant; the scent of blood was on the winds, and that was enough for them; and like any other fierce brutes, they obeyed the instincts of their training and followed it in rabid fury. In spite of the ridiculous experience of our late chase they were now on one still more preposterous. The Comanches at the very least were six miles off, and yet they expected to keep up with mounted men going at full speed, and they on foot. “Rouse the Hyrcanian tiger in his lair,”

Shake her week-old whelps
Kicking and mewling by the placid nose
Of a Nemæan lioness sleeping.

if you like the sport and want to see a reasoning animal “splurge” in comparative safety; but I advise you by all means to stand aside when a strong *human* specimen of the cat tribe, used to blood-lapping, has once dabbled his chops in it fairly. These animals are not brave, but simply ferocious. Like a bull

with a red cloth shaken at him, foaming and blind they plunge straight ahead, be it over a hundred-feet precipice into a quagmire, or what not, it is all the same ; there is but one idea, one hand at a time. " I smell the blood of an " Indian or Mexican, that's enough. And I am compelled to acknowledge that although I felt to the utmost how silly this was, I could not divest myself, in addition to the fear of being taunted with cowardice, of a feeling of admiration for this sort of unreckoning, headlong passion. It was imposing to my unsophisticated appreciation. What is more, the chivalry of companionship in danger most imperiously demands of one—to stand by your comrade through thick and thin, right or wrong, and do your reasoning afterwards about the prudence or imprudence of the steps which led to the scrape—first see him through it, then you may abuse him.

This was my logic as I pulled on a pair of boots, and in spite of the torture set off at the best speed I could make after my friends. I found some eight or ten Mexicans who had lost their horses, straggling along a quarter of a mile in their wake, and finding it was utterly impossible to catch up with them, I called these fellows around me and endeavored to keep them in a body to make a show at least, for I did not expect them to fight, of course. I was passing over the same ground on which a few days before I had felt my heart overflow to the good God, as I looked out on the smiling beauty of the scenes his beneficent care had framed in calmest harmonies to move the souls of men to peaceful joy, and hope, and adoration. Now, what a contrast ! Bloody passions were careering on the chase of death ! Deeds of savagery had been and were being enacted, making hideous a silence, the repose of power and love !—the presumptuous work of that same wrathful, sacrilegious spirit, which in the Titan Allegory dared, of old, to

"pluck

The misty crests of mountains by the hair,
In battle with the gods :"

and here I was—the identical sentimentalizer of that poetic hour—dragging my " weary length along," so far as I could judge, about in the stupid innocence of a calf led to slaughter. The

scene was the most preposterously serio-comic that ever I witnessed.

As we approached a clump of timber, after about an hour's walk, who should break suddenly upon our astonished view but puissant Antone, tearing towards us as if he and his horse were stark mad with fright ! We heard his voice long enough before he reached us. The slave was so terribly alarmed that we could scarcely understand a word he said—his enunciation was paralysed with fear ; and the " valiant Mars " of a little while back—now with his teeth chattering, and eyes almost bursting from their sockets, looking back over his shoulders as if all the " grizzly troop of Acheron " were in pursuit of him—was the most lamentable image of panic that can be conceived. We gathered from him, at last, that the Mexicans had caught up with the Comanches much sooner than they expected, no doubt ; that they had slaughtered and scalped every mother's son of them, except himself ; and that he, after holding the whole troop at bay for " Holy Virgin knows how long," had at last condescended to retreat and bring back the news.

Although I felt confident he was lying monstrously, I was no little alarmed. Making all due deductions, I supposed the vain-glorious fools had come upon the Comanches suddenly, too close for a back out, and they had given them a tremendous drubbing, scattering them, and probably killing the greater part ; for I knew perfectly well when they started, that they neither could nor would fight, and that this would be the result if they chanced to stumble upon the Indians.

The Colonel and Texan were both out of sight. Antone had seen nothing of them—had no doubt they too were scalped ; for the Indians were in hot pursuit, and " nothing but the lightning speed of his horse had saved him !" The best proof that there was some reality in the fellow's alarm, was, that no persuasion could induce him to stay with us another instant, but preferring even to risk the ride alone back to the Rancho he kept on at the same rate.

Now I felt, most painfully, how unutterably stupid our whole day's management had been. Had we stopped to reason an instant we might have foreseen this result to a certainty. But now

this miserable, headlong flurry had scattered those of us who could fight miles apart, over a wide prairie, to be cut to pieces in detail by the Indians pursuing the Mexicans back; and, what was still more, almost the whole population of the three Ranchos were scattered along for a mile out in the direction we came, in the eager and foolish hope to be the first to greet the conquering warriors returning.

It would be glorious sport for the Comanches to pick up these stragglers with their long lances as a farmer tosses turnips with a pitchfork. And, besides, what was I to do myself? The miserable beings with me were only in the way, and would attract, by their numbers, the attention of the Indians, when one might stand a chance of escaping. It was with great difficulty I could keep them from starting helter-skelter over the plain after Antone. I resolved at once that they should stay with me, for their running could avail nothing to themselves, as the Indians would catch them, of course, before they could get back to the Rancho. Determined to make the best of circumstances, I drew them after me into the timber, made them throw themselves flat upon the ground, and quietly awaited what might turn up.

We were kept in suspense but a few minutes, when I saw a mounted Indian making towards us from the direction of the battle-field, and fast as his horse could bring him. It was with great difficulty I could keep my heroes quiet. Though the man was a half-mile off, they raised their guns to fire at him, intending then to make a run for it any how.

I saw there was no room for trifling, as by this time a considerable troop were in view, and this fellow I supposed to be a scout: so I just gave my ragamuffins to understand that I would favor *them* with the contents of "double-barrel," instead of the Indian, if they didn't lie still and pass their fusees over to me. I knew that if I let them keep their guns, fire they would in their fright, and be just as apt to hit me as the Indians. After some little grumbling, they did as I commanded. I intended to do all the firing that was to be done myself, and they were so benumbed with fear that they were glad enough to leave it all to me.

The Indian by this time was pretty close to us. He bore a scalp on the top of his lance, at the sight of which my heroes

groaned and crossed themselves, feeling the tops of their heads to be sure that theirs were at home. I was in the very act of firing at the man—for I was resolved he should not pass, and he was within twenty paces of me, and evidently a regular bred Indian—I had my finger on the trigger, when one of the Mexicans sprang to his feet with a cry of joy, and rushed out to meet him. Here was a poser—which should I fire at? the Indian or treacherous Mexicans, for they were all on their feet and around him now.

It occurred to me as best to hold on a minute, for I had all their guns any way, and see what it meant. I was safe enough, so far as they were concerned; but what this sudden coalition with the Indian might portend was more than I could conjecture, especially when I saw them all start off, shouting, towards the distant party.

During the indecision, the critical moment had passed for an explanation, since the Mexicans were out of reach, and the Indian had dashed on. At first glance this may look like bad generalship in me, but the truth is, I understood the language very imperfectly. From what I knew of the Mexican character, it seemed impossible they would have dared to do this if there had been treachery in it; yet that fellow who went by was certainly a genuine Indian. What could it mean? Were they stark crazy to run out on the open prairie to meet a party of Indians, and offer them their scalps? That single Indian evidently belonged to a victorious party! was it some of the friendly tribes who had happened into the fight and turned the current? But Antone said he was the only one left alive! Oh! but he lies of a surety! What in the thunder *can* it mean? I suppose in any event it means that my scalp will go pretty shortly to join the Colonel's and Texan's on the end of their lances.

Pretty predicament my foolish love of adventure has got me into! Glorious fate to be pinned like a skewered goose to one of these live oaks by half a dozen lances, and left here to be eaten up piecemeal—the sand-rats nibbling away my toes—the ravens and that dirty Mexican eagle “boging” away at my eyes that have so often, “in fine phrensy rolling,” pierced the long aisles of coming time, and recognised my own image throned among the great,

and these curls which I have nursed so affectionately, glossy beneath a myrtle crown, the Muse's gift—How will they look now clotted with blood! each separate hair singing in the gale upon the end of a long, greasy lance, or stuck in the dirty belt of a lousy warrior? Oh, Apollo! thou "of the plectrum and the bow!" what a fate! I had plenty of time for pleasant cogitations such as these, before this perplexing mystery was cleared up.

After waiting here alone, in no very pleasant mood, some twenty minutes, I peeped from my hiding place in the "mott." My late treacherous allies had, by this time, joined the approaching party. Shouts of triumph rent the air, and I could see their "sombremos" sailing above the heads of the horsemen.

"Jupiter! take my cap, and thank thee,"

thought I; "you're in a gay humor, my friends! Mexicans never rejoice so obstreperously, but when some formidable enemy has been slain; and it is very certain that they consider the Colonel such an one. They fear him more than they do the Comanches even, and I suppose they have recognised his fiery scalp on its 'airy perch' at the top of a lance. Well, the only way left is to sell my own scalp dearly as I can."

I stepped back and examined my Mexican artillery. "Still imagination in bottomless conceit" would fail to compass the whole vexatious truth that stared me in the face from that survey. The vile fusees, as far as I could see, were not merely useless, but greatly more dangerous to myself than to any foe not close enough to have the benefit of their bursting. I threw them down from me in indignation. Why, the powder was as coarse as No. 1 shot—the grains crumbling to pieces—not one in a dozen being entire; the barrels, nearly all, with flaws in them, and coated thick with rust, inside and out. The locks defy all description—the flints, most of them, fragments of pebbles; some not loaded at all—others loaded half-way to the muzzle.

I addressed myself to the examination of faithful and sturdy "double-barrel," and determined to trust all to it. When the shouts seemed to be very close, I cautiously advanced to the edge of the timber for another look. It now occurred to me for the

first time, that the party had been a very long while getting to where I was concealed. They moved more like a funeral procession than like a victorious war party, and the triumphant shouts had now changed to a dolorous howl, most like that the wolves raise of a cloudy night, when in squads out on the prairie they sit on end, their noses pointed upwards, "complaining to the moon" of her uncertain light. There's the flaring "Serape," too, and the white cotton dress of the Mexicans: I wonder if the Indians have stripped the clothes from the poor rascals after killing them all, as Antone said, and decked themselves out in them? And there are the long lances in their hands. Mexicans don't carry lances, and they've got some half-dozen scalps on them! What *does* it all mean?

I never was so inextricably puzzled in my life. The party were now within a short distance. They moved at a very solemn pace—the cavalry in double file—the two in front bearing lances with that ominous hairy pendant still dripping blood. Just behind them two others had a dead body between them; next to them two others again, with lances, and the same addendum. Then came another corse borne by a single man before him; holding the hand of the body, which was that of a grey-haired old man, rode a stout young fellow bleeding from the neck like a stuck ox; behind them two more lance-bearers; then followed several wounded men supported in their saddles; then, all mixed in together with the remainder of the troop, came the straggling herd of my quondam warriors.

Last of all—"amazement duplicate!"—came the Colonel and Texan. I could scarcely believe my own eyes! but there they were in the flesh—there could be no shadow of a doubt—their scalps safe on the top of their heads. There was a broad grin on the Colonel's face, and the Texan haw! haw'd! his coarse glee, though they seemed to drag themselves along with great difficulty, from fatigue. This set me at rest; there was plainly no great danger, at least, however strange the affair still seemed. So I sprang from my hiding-place and ran to meet them. My sudden appearance caused some confusion among the troops, who were evidently panic-stricken and ready to run at anything. The Colonel greeted me with a jeering shout:

"Haw ! haw ! Kentuck, we were just laughing at you. That was a high caper of yours, taking the guns away from the poor Yellow-Bellies ! Not so bad though, old fellow. Don't be discouraged : you'll make a Texan some of these days yet. Were you soft enough to expect to shoot with the things after you got 'em ? Pleasant time you've had. Hasn't your hair turned white ? Antone scared you, did he ? Pity you hadn't shot the rascal ; the first gun that was fired, he broke !"

"Well, but stop, for heaven's sake—tell me what it all means ! Who was that Indian that staved by me ?"

"Ha ! ha ! it was that Indian scared you, was it ? He is a renegade of the Tonquoways ; the tribe were all killed some time ago but him and seven or eight others ! He does look a little like a Comanche, sure enough. He was going to announce the victory, as these fools call it, at the Ranchos. He's a 'high particular' of the old hag's, and lives with her ; you didn't know it ? Between him and Antone, you've had enough to make a fellow feel ticklish ! You thought Texas and me were murdered, and that your time was to come next, did you ?"

"Yes ; I thought you were gone cases to a certainty ! But did you get into the fight at last ?"

"No, d—n it ; we've had our race for nothing. They've got his horse for Texas, though !"

"And ours are gone, I suppose ?"

"Yes, clear enough."

"But what do these dead and wounded men mean ? These creatures didn't make a fight of it, surely, did they ?"

"Fight of it, indeed ! You'd as well talk of a flock of sucking doves fighting with hawks, as of these fellows making anything of a fight with Comanches ?"

"Well, how was it ?"

"Curse their stupid whinings, they deafen me ! Come, let's fall back a little, and I will tell you all about it. That Indian you saw is the only brave man they had, and he told me the whole story. You see, the cowardly asses, after Texas had scared them as you saw, tore off on the trail of the Indians, thinking, I suppose, that they were far enough out of their reach. So long as they had nothing before them but the tracks, they **were**

brimful of blood and thunder! They frightened the cranes and deer—made the prairie-hens scurry away a little quicker and further than usual—and the partridges whirr! whirr! more suddenly in their faces from the grass. This was about the amount of damage done, until they galloped into the timber on the ‘Medina.’

“You know that’s a dry Creek, with a water-hole here and there every eight or ten miles on its course. As they came through at full speed on the other side of the skirt of woods, they found themselves right in the camp of the Comanches! The main body of the Indians hurried together the mules and horses they had stolen from us, and started them off at full tilt over the prairie. The Mexicans drew up their horses stock still in a squad. They were completely stupefied at finding themselves face to face with a foe they dreaded mortally. After the Indians had got their plunder fairly under way, about six of them wheeled out of the crowd, and turned to punish their impudent pursuers.

“They have always held the Mexicans in such contempt, that they never think of stopping to count them before a fight, but rush right among them, it matters not what the disparity of numbers may be. There were two young chiefs, brothers, leading this war party, who have been very famous in the border-fights. The Mexican women scared their babies to sleep with the names of these two braves, so notoriously formidable were they. They were mounted upon your horse and the Texan’s, and felt unusually spunky, because their steeds were taller than those of their followers. So they came staving down upon the poor Mexicans with lances in rest, and rode clear through them, bearing down man and horse. Some five or six Mexicans, out of the whole number of twenty, tasted the sod at this charge; their comrades remaining perfectly passive—not pulling a trigger or raising an arm.

“The Comanches, as soon as they could gather up their headway, turned and charged upon them again. By this time the Mexicans had remembered that they had guns; and, pulling trigger desperately in the direction of the Indians, they actually shot two of their horses. The horses fell, and the warriors instantly rushed at two of the Mexicans, and dragged them from

their horses by the leg, and then, after knocking them on the head with the butts of their own guns, jumped into their saddles.

"In the meantime Antone, without attempting to fire his gun, threw it down and started, shrieking, over the prairie. The foremost one of the young chieftains, in this second charge, ran his lance through the body of a Mexican, and bore him clear over his horse's rump on its point, and, dropping him, galloped on. His brother, who followed him, drove his lance into the breast of old Callistro (the frosty-haired old carcass they are lugging ahead there), and while he was extracting it, his son—who, for a wonder, had some manhood in him—lifted himself in his saddle and struck, with all his might, a long thin-bladed knife he wore, into the back of the Comanche. The knife doubled up like a piece of tin on the shoulder-blade of the Indian. He had extricated his lance from the body of the father, and wheeling in his saddle, drove it into the neck of the son, bearing him to the ground, and dashed on.

"The Indian that scared you, happening to remember that he had an American pistol, fired it at the chief as he was galloping off, and, by accident, striking him in the back part of the head, tumbled him from the horse of Texas, dead enough. His brother, who was hurrying on before, galloped away with the rest of his friends, thinking all was safe, and intending to rejoin the main body, who were now a quarter of a mile off; when the Mexicans, regaining their courage as the enemy got further off, shouted after them, tauntingly, 'Come back, you cowards, and get the body of your comrade!'

"You know it's a sacred point with these fellows never to leave a corpse of their braves with an enemy. The young chief heard the taunt and stopped his horse, while the others of his company kept on; and pausing for an instant, he shook his lance above his head, and swore, I suppose in his own tongue, that he would regain it or die. Without calling his friends back, he charged alone upon an enemy he scorned too much. The Mexicans were still standing in a passive bewildered group; and as this single man came thundering back towards them, they sat in stupid inaction upon their horses, undetermined whether they must run or wait to be killed.

"The gallant young chieftain rushed his horse right into the midst of them, and springing to the ground, threw his arms round the body of his brother, and lifting it as a sort of shield in front of him, commenced backing towards your horse, which he had been riding. Your horse happened not to be so well trained as his own, and instead of waiting for him, broke off for the main body. So the daring young fellow was left, alone and on foot, a half mile from his clansmen, who had not missed him, and were going ahead.

"Now was the time for Mexican valor! and the cowardly rascals charged upon this single man with most ferocious daring. He fought like a tiger, still holding on to the body of his brother, while he let fly his arrows and plied with quick thrusts his lance among them, and would probably have succeeded in driving them back, had not our Indian by this time loaded his pistol again, and shot him in the breast. He fell back with his brother's body upon him, and the war-whoop on his lips!"

"Well, but, Colonel, according to your account, these two young Comanche knights were the only men killed. Where did these heroes get all their scalps from?"

"Oh, they are the scalps of the men we shot. The Mexicans, after the Indians were out of sight, saw one of their 'Buzzard Eagles' flying about a gully near the scene of the fight, and on examining it found four bodies covered up side by side in the dirt. They dragged them out and took off their scalps, hoisted them on the ends of their lances, and are parading them as part of their own trophies. They are going to tell their people at the Ranchos that they killed them, and such bragging lies as they will bluster out, you cannot conceive of. There never was a happier national emblem chosen before than they have selected. This Mexican Eagle is a dirty cowardly creature, that feeds upon carcases, and will hardly attack a live rabbit—a perfect buzzard! And there is such close affinity between their habits and the Mexican character, that I don't wonder at their hoisting a carrion-bird upon their national standard. There is a fitness in the thing that is really beautiful!

"The Indians had stopped to hide their dead here, and this is the way it happened that these fellows stumbled upon them—very

much to their own dismay, for when they left us they had not the slightest expectation of catching up with the Indians. They merely wished to make a sputter and have something to brag about to their women and children of what terrible things they *would* have done if they had only found the enemy. I am sorry these two young chiefs were killed in a fight with such dastardly knaves, for they were worthy of a better death. If we had killed them it would have been well enough; but to die by accident at the hands of an enemy they scorned too much to count, was a hard fate for brave men.

"I have fought with two parties commanded by these young warriors, and they were the most daring Comanches I ever saw. They have been following the Santa Fé boys that started from Austin several months ago, and I think they must have cut off several of their parties. Didn't you notice they had a number of articles of American clothing among them? They had shirts and waistcoats all put on the wrong way. The Tonquoway says one of those we killed had a cotton shirt tied by the sleeves around his waist. That expedition is doing badly, I haven't a doubt, for this whole party fought better, and showed less fear of our guns than I have ever known them. I can only account for it on the ground that they have been successful while hanging about the skirts of that party in cutting off and killing a number of them, whom they have stripped; and this unusual success has overcome, to some degree, the wholesome terror of our guns we frontier marksmen had inspired them with. Why, I have known a single Texan to keep at bay fifty Comanches, by merely raising his rifle to his face every time they came too close. It has been a point of tactics with them I never knew a deviation from before—never to risk the loss of a warrior by charging down upon a man armed with a rifle, until he has fired it off.

"A single individual has often escaped from large bodies of them by reserving his fire, threatening them with it whenever they ventured near enough for their arrows to take effect. They always wheel and dash back when a rifle they believe to be loaded is presented at them, and the man, if he is cool and collected, will keep them off until he reaches the timber, when the Comanches will give it up as a bad job, for they never follow

an armed man into the woods. They have an unconquerable horror of the brush. I'll give you an instance of this.

"About three years ago an old fellow, a regular backwoodsman, named Andrews, and myself, were skirting up the San Antonio, 'still hunting.' In this sort of a hunt, as you know, we go on foot, trusting entirely to our knowledge of their habits for discovering the deer, who come in from the prairies, regularly, about eleven o'clock, to drink.

"We saw a fine herd out on the prairie, who, from their regular gait, were evidently going to water. The course they were pursuing we saw would bring them within gun-shot of a 'mott' of timber about half a mile from us ; to reach it we had to cross this distance of open prairie. We accordingly started across, and about half way a party of at least a hundred Comanches showed themselves ; they had been concealed on the other side of the 'mott,' and as soon as we were far enough from the timber, they rushed at us. We stopped. They galloped around us in a circle of about two hundred yards at first, then closed up gradually until they got close enough to send their arrows at us. I fired. A warrior reeled in his saddle, and two others took him off. They instantly dashed out of reach of our bullets. Andrews reserved his fire, while I loaded.

"We kept retreating towards the timber we had left, and they closed round us again. This time Andrews fired, and as soon as he did it, they, thinking both of our charges were out, came upon us in a body, within twenty paces, at full speed ; but they had made a slight mistake, and I gave them a blizzard that sent one of them to 'kingdom come.'

"We had a deep gully to cross just before we reached the timber, and as we were both walking backwards, with our faces to the Indians, we did not perceive it until Andrews, whose gun was loaded, pitched backwards into it. I had barely time to get my powder down my rifle, when the Indians, seeing this, came yelling at me. I thought the game was up with me, but I stood firm, and fired my blank load at them. They wheeled back, as usual, and I jumped down the gully. I had one arrow sticking in my shoulder when I picked myself up, and Andrews, who had by this time climbed the other side of the gully, shouted that they

were off for good ; and when I got on the top, I saw them going at full tilt, two hundred yards off. The crack of my rifle saved us that time to a certainty.

"But their success with the Santa Fé boys has spoiled all such games as this now, and we shall have some hard fighting with them hereafter. I see by to-day's experience, as the old woman said about skinning her eels, that they are getting 'used' to being shot."

Here the Colonel was interrupted. The foremost of the stragglers from Rancho had by this time met our troops, and they were greeted by a prolonged, dolorous yell, that was taken up by one squad after another, until the mournful echoes swelled back in one general burst from what seemed to be the united voice of the whole population of all the Ranchos together.

These semi-barbarous people express every character of sentiment in most uncouth exaggerations. It is impossible to conceive anything more unpleasantly sad and monotonous than this lengthened and simultaneous wail—quaver on quaver still higher, and mounting, from voices of every tone and pitch, of every sex and age, until the very heavens rang again with their wild moans. It was a strange scene, and, for the life of me, I could not help being impressed with the belief that it was all sincere.

As we approached the Rancho of the old Senora, they came pouring out to meet us, of all ages and conditions, from the "blue, meagre Hag," with the shrill "piping treble" of her screech, to the "freckled whelp, Hag-born," with the richer cadence of its blubbering grief, tearing their long, coarse hair, and tossing their limbs into the most grotesque expression of sorrow for one minute, as they looked upon the dead and bleeding heroes, and in another, as the lance-bearers would wave before their eyes the gory and dripping scalps, bursting into an exulting shout, laughing like Bedlamites amid their tears. The scene was most ludicrously comic for one instant, then "pitiful ! 'twas wondrous pitiful !" the next. The chivalrous warrior Mexicans themselves bore all with marvellous stoicism, only giving vent now and then to a grunted sob, but evidently striving most manfully to deport them with martial sternness, and awe the squalling children and women

by their valorous endurance. They held their faces stiffly turned towards the horizon, their eyes set in savage abstraction, as if they were bent upon looking down some fierce foe from the clouds.

All this was entirely becoming gallant and ferocious warriors ; and the women and children shuddered as they looked upon this savage abstraction, that seemed to say, "Oh that an enemy would show himself, that we might eat him !" But their outré and almost frantic demonstrations of passionate feeling actually inspired me with a comparative respect for these creatures. My sympathies were specially enlisted for the young man who had been wounded in the defence of his father, and who, regardless of it, still clung with such filial affection to the lifeless body.

This seemed to me an exhibition of traits common to humanity, I was neither prepared for nor expected to see in the Mexican character. I felt myself irresistibly drawn towards this man, from the very novelty of the thing. A Mexican obeying the impulses sacred to manhood ! It was a phenomenon not to be met with every day ; and as I happened to possess some surgical knowledge, I determined to do all that I could to save the poor fellow ; so I followed him to his hut. It was a part of the large Rancho of the Senora Cavillo—a continuation of the side of the square court, facing upon the San Antonio River—and was a sort of burrow dug into the face of the bank, that looked more like a large dutch-oven than anything else.

We had crossed the river and climbed the hill, and his comrades were helping the exhausted man from his horse, when his wife, a slight, remarkably fair, and beautiful Mexican woman, came rushing out of her house, her long hair all dishevelled, and shrieking frantically, threw herself upon his bleeding neck, kissing his blue lips, and pouring out between each kiss such pathetic wails of passionate grief as I never heard before ; and following in the wake came all the "kith-and-kin," numerous enough for a half-dozen generations, who tumbled themselves "*en masse*" upon the poor man, "shrieking their dolours forth," and kissing his feet, his fingers, and his clothes, with such unreckoning eagerness, that they were actually smothering what little life there was left out of the miserable wretch, when I ran

in among them, and scattered right and left until I made a lane for him to be borne through.

When we had succeeded in getting him into the house, all my efforts were unavailing in keeping out the crowd; and although the man had lost blood enough already to make a horse faint, they were jammed around him thick as they could press, everybody questioning him about the fight, and he, while the blood gushed at every word, answering—game to the last—in Mexican exaggerations of the terrific deeds of his party and himself. His voice grew fainter and fainter and even the national glory of “bragg” faded gradually into articulations upon his lips, as he sank down. I now interposed in earnest, and drove out all the whining pack, and pinned down the “bull’s hide,” that answered for a door, upon them.

The man had been laid upon his bed; and in returning to examine the insensible body, I stumbled upon a “sombrero” which was lying upon the floor. I kicked the hat aside without thinking of it particularly, when, at the same moment, the Colonel lifted the “hide,” and stepped in.

“Ah!” said he, “you think, I suppose, that this fellow’s wife, who is making such a whinneying there, is the most afflicted and virtuous dame that can be conceived, don’t you?”

“Yes—she seems to be in earnest with her grief.”

“Ha, ha! you’ve got a heap to learn yet about Mexican character! You see that man’s hat there on the floor? Well, that belongs to a young Mexican, who had been in here with the wife of this ‘spike-buck’ that lies there nearly dead; and when they heard us coming, the scamp jumped up and hustled in such a hurry that he left his ‘sombrero’ behind, and this huzzy ran out to meet her husband, as if she were distracted with grief. You musn’t take things as they seem to be with these Mexicans!”

“But, Colonel, I am going to do what I can to save this man, any how.”

“Yes, yes! well enough! He did amazingly for a Mexican, in fighting for his father. He’s not accountable for the treachery of his wife.”

On examining his wounds, I found that one of the small arteries of the neck had been severed by the lance; it was still bleeding

very freely, and how to stop it was the question. An old shrivelled woman, who had persisted in remaining, brought me some "bone-dust," and gabbled away in a long dissertation upon its curative powers and positive infallibility in such cases. As I had no instrument for taking up the artery, I saw at once that the only chance for saving the man was to hold my finger upon it steadily and patiently until a reunion of the parts occurred; so driving the old woman and her "yarbs" and "bone-dust" from the room, in spite of her obstreperous cries that I was going to murder the poor man, I stretched myself upon the bed beside him, and with my finger upon the bleeding orifice, determined to try what gentle and constant pressure would do towards supplying the deficiency of surgical instruments; and there I lay by that insensible body, fending off the obstreperous hypocrisy of his wife and friends with one hand, while the other was steadily pressed upon the stubborn wound.

The extravagant howls of grief gradually, as the night advanced, died away, and all was heavy silence except the deep breathing of the wounded man, and an occasional interlude of "toowhit! toowhit! toowhoo!" from the gloomy woods on the opposite side of the river. This was a singular position of mine.

The low squalid hut was dimly lit by a lamp on the earth; on pallets of goat-skins, strewn about the floor, lay the snoring relatives; while the wife, seated on a stool by the fire, was rocking herself to and fro, accompanying this now and then with sudden bursts of grief, that died off into a low monotonous wail, and then into silence again. So the long hours dragged on, while I, wearied, but sleepless, watched over this man's swoon. Towards day the bleeding was checked, and he showed some signs of life. I was gratified by this, but had to defend him stoutly from potions the women insisted upon cramming down his throat, that were no doubt equal to the cabalistic concoctions into which the "wart of toad and egg of newt" entered in the witches' caldron.

I fought them off successfully, and after getting him quiet again I walked out into the open air, to stretch my limbs once more after the painful restraint of nearly twelve hours in one position. Day was just beginning to break, and heavy mists hung an

almost impalpable curtain over everything—the peculiar stillness of that hour reminded me of those lines of Keats :

“ And obstinate silence
Came heavily again,” &c.

As I was in the act of stepping out from behind the hut, I saw indistinctly through the fog, two men splendidly mounted, standing near the great gate of the Rancho, and conversing with the old madam, in low, eager tones. They were dressed in dark cloaks, with pistols in front of them in holsters, and the “ Toledo ” swinging from their belts. They had a silver band around their “ sombreros,” and the white gleam of the rich metal showed itself from various parts of their handsome outfit—from the handles of their stilettoes and heavy horseman’s pistols, from the peak of their saddles, and their splendid bridle-bits. Altogether they were formidable and showy-looking men, and I felt no sort of disposition to interrupt their business with the old woman by showing myself, especially as I was unarmed. I drew myself back and kept perfectly quiet, endeavoring to catch as much of their talk as I could. It was but little I could gather, though it was sufficient to convince me that it was Agatone himself (the Colonel’s great enemy), and one of his lieutenants.

In a few moments they wheeled and galloped off through the mist, while I went in to get my gun, and started hastily off for the Colonel’s Rancho, determined to advertise him as soon as possible of this ominous visit, which I foresaw must portend some further bloody work.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVIS, THE HALF-BREED.

AFTER a hurried walk, I reached the Rancho. The first object that met my eye there convinced me that a new arrival had occurred during the night. A horse was standing at the picket blocks, rigged off in a style so peculiar as can only be conceived of on this frontier. There was something taken from all parties to compose this characteristic equipment. The bridle, lariat, quirt, and buffalo-robe had belonged to some Comanche warrior, who had bitten the dust before the unerring rifle of perhaps their present owner. The silver-mounted saddle had once been honored by the seat of some tinsel-bearing braggadocio of Santa Anna's regular officials. The blanket was American, probably from the packs of the Santa Fé traders. The half-gallon water-gourd looked like a "big-bellied bottle," with a second one, a little larger, hitched to its bottom by the neck, and all made fast by a transparent raw-hide, fitting like wax, drawn over them both. I thought it was a double glass-bottle, in reality, until examination showed me that it was a complete gourd. The raw-hide cover was marked with sundry curious hieroglyphics, which showed that it came from some Indian village towards the Rocky Mountains. The steed himself was a regular vicious-looking, pied, skew-ball of a mustang. "And the owner of this eccentric paraphernalia! he must be an 'out-and-outer!' a real 'wild boy!' and this horse is foamy and blown—he must have been running for it! Some more news from the Comanches, I expect! I'll call the Colonel out, and tell him about that fellow, Agatone, first, before I go in to see this man, for he may not be the right sort of character to talk before."

I saw the Colonel, at this moment, step, yawning and stretching, lazily to the door. He was just in the act of greeting me with his usual loud jeering welcome, when I made a quick gesture of caution, and beckoned him out. He caught his breath instantly, and stepped quietly behind the house.

I followed him, and having communicated my news in a whisper, he almost turned black in the face, and champed his teeth heavily, like a wild boar, at hearing that his mortal enemy had been so near him and escaped. He seized me, with the grip of a grizzly bear, by the arm, and hurried me into the cow-pen at a safer distance from the house; and between the low, smothered growl of curses to the name of Agatoné, he questioned me eagerly as to every point in regard to the appearance of the men, the length of time since they started, the direction they took, &c., until, being satisfied in this respect, he grew a little more self-possessed, and thanked me for coming so soon to let him know. "For," said he, "I hav'n't a doubt the wolfish sneak has a camp somewhere close at hand, and all his pack with him. I must go over to the old madam's and start the Tonquoway on his trail; for, although she likes the Indian, he likes me better, and hates Agatone more. He will find out where they are camped, and bring me back the news; and *then!*" he fairly trembled as he clutched his knife. "But I am glad you called me out as you did; for that d—d mongrel creature in the house, there—I wouldn't have him to hear this for a horse!"

"Who is he, Colonel?"

"Why, the devil only knows, for nobody else claims him! He's a half-breed Mexican and white. His name is Davis. He's a thieving, cut-throat rascal, that lives between both parties, and on both. He has been all through Mexico, California—everywhere, indeed!—knows everybody, and has plundered everybody—Americans, Mexicans, Indians, and all; and every one hates him, and feels uneasy while he is about; for he is such a lying, treacherous villain, that there is no telling when you are safe where he is. He has been living, until the last month or two, down yonder, at the Rancho of that poor fool of a Texan lieutenant I told you about, that married a Mexican woman, and

has been making a 'spike buck' of him; and he, poor sneak, hasn't had the manhood to drive him off. He went away of himself, a short time since, on some treacherous expedition, and I hoped he was gone for good, when he came staving up here this morning, all in a sweat, with the news that there is a large camp of Comanches, about fifteen miles off, on the Medina. He says they chased him, but I doubt it. I am afraid there is some treachery in it. I don't like him and Agatone being in the neighborhood at the same time. I expect, for one, that we shall have to tie him up and shoot him! But I must go! You walk in as if you had just come, and be cautious how you talk before him."

So we parted, he setting off speedily for the Rancho, while I stepped carelessly into the house. There were two men sitting at the table with the Texan, who introduced me in a characteristic manner, merely saying, as he nodded from me to a tall, stout, sunburnt young American, who had rather a soft look out of his large, meaningless, flaring eyes, "Kentuck, this is the lieutenant! and this man," nodding at the other man, "is Davis! Sit down, or you'll have nothing left here to eat. The 'woman' will have to cook more for the Colonel. Did you see him as you came along?"

"Yes, I saw him going towards the upper Ranchos."

"Did your pet Mexican die? haw, haw! You were nicely set to work, to go to all that trouble to save a filthy hog of a Mexican from dying. Why, I had much sooner have stamped his entrails out!"

"I have no doubt of it," said I, so soon as the laugh in which the other two had joined would permit me to be heard; "it would be impossible for you to understand the interest I took in this man."

"Yes, I have got no blarney in me to waste on a brute of a Mexican."

"Nobody doubts your having too much of the brute in you, to care for others, whether fellow brutes or men." I said this in rather an excited tone, for I was provoked at the taunting coarseness of my reception.

The Texan sprang to his feet, and clutching at his belt, said,

"Look here, Kentuck, I don't allow people to talk to me in that sort of a way, sir!"

The lieutenant here interposed, in a good-humored manner, and soon restored a negative sort of peace, though the Texan was surly about it for some time.

This was a very foolish display of sensitiveness on my part, which a little further knowledge of the spirit of frontier life would have saved me from. He did not mean anything more than a coarse joke; and my dignified flare-up was all "pearls before swine" among such men, which I felt afterwards was a little verdant, and out of keeping with the tone I should have preserved under circumstances I had voluntarily thrown myself into. The truth is, I was fagged and out of spirits, from the loss of the whole night's rest, after the fatigues and suffering of the day before, and had little of the reckless buoyancy left, which was necessary to carry me without difficulty through such scenes. I dwell upon this little incident, because it was characteristic, and the reader will see that I afterwards had some trouble about it. When we were quieted again, and got to work upon our breakfast, I took a good look at the new comers.

The lieutenant, as they called him, impressed me as a greasy, easy, good-for-nothing sort of a somebody; while Davis, who was a thin, athletic person, with a pale, olive complexion, wore upon his sharp face that keen, restless, knavish look, to be in the presence of which, makes one feel fidgety. There was a quick, incessant play of light about his eyes that reminded me of a snake's tongue vibrating in strong sunshine.

The fellow was dressed in the extreme of a mongrel dandyism, which seemed to be the result of an untiring effort to unite all the exaggerations of all the costumes he had ever seen, and was more of a hotch-potch than even the equipage of his horse. His coarse, black hair, plastered with lard into genuine "soap locks," a half-yard in length, was sticking about his shoulders, over which was thrown, with a most jaunty air, a full-circle cloak of coarse blue cloth, lined down the fronts with flaming scarlet velvet, which was so disposed as to show its every inch; his neckcloth was a coarse silk of the same gaudy color, and disposed in folds, the amplitude of which would have laid the Broadway dandies

altogether in the shade ; and, in point of jewelry, he could have snapped his fingers at them too, so far as number was concerned, at least : his smutty bosom was literally studded with pins and brooches of every quality and size, from silver and tin foil, up to pure gold. As he caught my eye upon him, mistaking its expression for admiration, he jumped to his feet, and jerked up his sombrero,—banded two-thirds of the way to the top of its sugar-loafed crown with red and white beads—and setting it pertly awry upon his stringy locks, with arms a-kimbo, under-lip compressed, and eyebrows puckered into an expression of savage pomposity, he strutted stiffly out to and fro in front of me. I could scarcely avoid bursting into a hearty fit of laughter, as he recalled the quaint description of an “Old-Time Euphuist,” or transcendental coxcomb :

Resplendent—glistening
Like Juno's witless Bird, he ruffled, when
Beneath the opening portcullis of Morn
He strutted back and forth—the mimic Argus
Of his wide tail outspread, that he might sun
The tasselled glories of his shiny head
Within its hundred eyes !²

Oh, it was rich ! I screwed my face into an expression of intense admiration. This went to his heart, and stepping in front of me, with a lordly wave of his hand, that fairly glistened with rings of every metal and size, he addressed me with a loud nasal twang to his insolent voice :

“Señor Kentuck ! I have been a great traveller ! Prodigious traveller ! I have seen the world, Señor, like a brave man ! I have walked over bars of gold ! and have tasted all there is in it a gal-lant man dare taste ! Yes, Señor, from the ‘Pulque’ and the ‘Noyau’ of the dirty ‘Rancho’ of ‘Dobeys’ and logs, to the flash-ing wines in the marble mansion on the ‘Hacienda’ of a Don’—from the dirty calabash of a naked Indian, to a silver bowl in the palaces of Montezuma—I have drank till I could touch it with my finger ! and this ain’t all either ; the Señoras have loved me in all these places ! I have sucked the nectar from the yellow flowers in my way from ‘Tierra Calliente,’ where they melted to a look, and died away to my touch, up to ‘Tierra Fries,’ where their frozen

bosoms could thaw to no other glance than mine ! and, in the great Mexico itself, they crowded around me with such eagerness that they almost tore my splendid clothes to tatters, and I had to draw my stiletto so, to keep them off !” and suiting the action to the word, he whipped it out and flourished it with wonderful rapidity before our eyes. “Yes, Señor—”

“Yes,” interrupted Texas, jumping to his feet, “you beat thunder and alligator swallowing all hollow ! You’ll die off into a long jackass bray—pewter drops—cotton velvet—glass beads and all, if you don’t stop. Blast me, you are worse than a Mexican !”

This seemed the climax of contempt, according to his ideas of the force of expletives, and he paused for breath, looking at the fellow with the most ludicrous expression of contempt.

Davis had paused at the interruption, his hand still holding the stiletto in the air. He had listened, at first, with an expression of blank astonishment, that anybody should dream of interrupting so musical a flow of eloquence ; but when he heard his finery talked about in such disrespectful terms, his eyes fairly blazed again with malignant ferocity, and there was a very devil’s venomous passion in his whole air as he stood for an instant gazing at the Texan after he got through ; then, quickly as the spring of a wild cat, threw himself convulsively at his unarmed breast. The stiletto must strike him full in the throat ! I sprang towards them, but a stronger arm was upon him before me. Sooner than I could think, he was lying prostrate and stunned against the opposite side of the house, and the Colonel, with his knee upon his breast, was wrenching his weapon from his hand, when the lieutenant and myself together, succeeded in arresting his arm.

“Damn it, let go, boys ; we will have to kill him yet, anyhow !”

The Texan here interposed, and we dragged the Colonel off backwards.

“If there’s any killing, I’ll do it myself !” said the Texan, as he sprang with his heavy boot-heels upon the chest of the prostrate wretch. Leaving the Colonel to recover his feet, we ran to him and jerked him off, telling him the man was dead

already. We succeeded after great difficulty in quieting them, as they saw that the man yet lay perfectly still. I threw some water in his face, and in a little while he began to stir, and was shortly on his feet again, for he was only stunned : he staggered out of the door, and vomited a quantity of blood that had been started by the Texan's heels, while he stood laughing at him and enjoying the "fun," as he called it.

The man came sullenly into the house after a while, half-doubled up, and seeming effectually cowed ; his head muffled in a bandage ; his finery all bedraggled ; his vain-glory all gone ; looking as I have seen a dung-hill cock, which had been caught stealing dough in the kitchen, and been thoroughly ducked in the slop-tub by the angry old black cook, and which, shaking the bran and filth from its eyes and stringy feathers, would slink, with a doleful air, to hide its diminished head in a corner from the gaze of its dames, till its glory was replenished.

Could some of those "Yellow Flowers," the nectar from whose lips he had sucked, have seen him then ! the gay ideal of their voluptuous dreams, skulking in a corner, the "shine" rubbed off, and gore and dirt smeared in its place ; his baubles trampled, and those sleek, flowing locks, clotted and confused beneath the ties of that most flaming of cravats ; would he not have realized to them,

"Cupid hoodwinked with a scarf,
Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lathe,
Scaring the ladies like a crow-keeper?"

Gentle "Yellow Flowers !" your fortunate stars have spared you this rude shock, and peacefully their mellow beams may rain on your warm brows the dew of visions ; and in them you may still undoubting see that glowing form, with all the gallant show unmarred, that left its impress on your hearts ! Blissful ignorance ! and perhaps all you will hear of this will be the story of a triumph, when, on some sad-eyed eve, you sit beneath the moss-hung oak, sighing with the breeze for lack of warmer sighs,

"To take the amorous echo up,"

you shall hear an answer to your hearts in his exulting shout as

he comes careering across the plains upon his sweltering steed, to dash the gory trophies of his vengeance at your feet !

Even now he seems to be forging the silent thunder of revenge ! I can perceive that the malignant fiend has not been exorcised by any means, with all the truculent efforts of these two rugged "clerks of the green-wood," who have taken the matter in hand ; for as he sits crouched in the corner, I can see the red light of hate direly gleaming from his eyes, like two burning coals from a dark hearth, as he watches the movements of his late assaulters about the room. I shall look for terrible results ere the ghost of his honor be appeased !

And now, fair daughters of the North, how do *you* fancy this "Mercurio" of the sunny South ? At the bare recital of this Protean versatility of attraction, will you not own the "soft impeachment ?" Come, no coy airs ; confess it frankly—at even the rough sketch of a hero so exquisitely "just the thing"—that the delicious fluttering tumult at your hearts has waked "the silent war of lilies and of roses" in a Parthian fight, careering up from your warm bosoms, over your "silver cheeks," and breaking in red spray beneath the azure veiling of your temples ? Acknowledge that you are desperately taken, not for my sake, but for the sake of the dandies at home ; for how can they survive it, should I, in pursuance of my duty as the nearest representative of this gallant Mexican "Euphuist," be compelled to assign you "a local habitation" in the "Tierra Fries," that arctic realm of "frozen bosoms ?" You are difficult enough of assault now, and home dandies have not the fiery glance of our "Euphuist" to thaw icebergs ! and furthermore, upon this same dreadful penalty, dare not institute unfair comparisons between him and our "domestic manufacture." For though my client

" Cannot sing,
Nor heel the high lavolt, nor sweeten talk,
Nor play at subtle games—fair virtues all
To which the *Grecians* are most prompt and pregnant,"

i.e. "Corinthians" of Broadway !—though he may not be possessed of "the still and dumb discursive devil" that lurks in these, yet his is a matchless fling at a "fandango," and he can swing

the dark-eyed daughters of the Sun," to the merry click of the castanet, with most voluptuous grace, through many a tangled, quaint, and winding measure, which they, with all the aid of "dancing shoes with nimble soles," would have found it impossible to foot it through. We must leave him in eclipse for a little while, to go on with our story.

CHAPTER IX.

A MEXICAN WAR HORSE.

AND now came another scene of ludicrous bluster and confusion. A Mexican scout had returned and reported a large body of Indians camped on the Medina; thus confirming the report brought in by Davis. We must go and rout them; but how to get there was the puzzle! The Texan had recovered his horse, but the Colonel, myself, and the Lieutenant had none. We could not get them of the Mexicans, and should we have to foot it the fifteen miles?

While we were debating this perplexing question—every man talking to himself and all together—the remnant of yesterday's party galloped up. They had concluded by this time that it was best to have us along; not that they could not exterminate the enemy to-day as they had yesterday by their unassisted valor! No; forbid it, shades of Montezumas, Aztecs, and Castilians all! By their united glories they needed not our arms! But they pitied us, seeing that we would go if we had to walk; and felt a generous sympathy kindle in their warrior breasts at witnessing our ardor; so that they had brought led-horses for us.

And there was Antone again—the brazen knave bragging with as obstreperous impudence as ever; though he kept a little back and a sharp eye about him this time, for the Texan—but this only made it necessary for him to talk the louder. As his character of privilege as boaster and spokesman-general seemed to be conceded, even the bloody veterans of yesterday sat quietly and listened while he made speeches for them, expressing in super-grandiloquence the sense they entertained of their own magnani-

mous generosity, in thus furnishing us gratuitously with the means of sharing with them on equal terms the flowering laurels they were about to gain.

After this peroration, they opened their ranks, and led out for our admiration the steeds they had brought us. Oh Mars! hadst thou belonged to the mythology of Mexico, they would have made thee all legs! The horses they rode themselves were nimble and active animals, while those they offered us were the veriest starved, worn, ulcerated, miserable anatomies that can be conceived—looking as though their legs could hardly totter under the raw and wretched sack of bones which made up their shrivelled bodies. It appeared that they were three pack-horses the Comanches had left behind them as useless in their passage through our “bottom.” I turned off in angry despair, while the Colonel and Lieutenant selected the two best, determined to make the most of it.

Just at this moment, a Mexican woman came running to us with the information that she had noticed a number of wolves prowling about a low thicket, a few hundred yards off. The Comanches had passed through it as they were approaching to attack us the morning before, and she supposed they had left a dead body there, for the wolves looked so bold and eager—as they always do where a human body is concerned—that she had been afraid to go herself to see what it was, but that they were tearing and fighting over something on the ground she could distinguish very plainly. We determined to leave the dispute about the horses and see what this meant.

The Mexicans charged with headlong rashness and shouts down upon the thicket, and five or six wolves actually scurried out, with tails between their legs, looking a good deal frightened. They were so much exhilarated at this success, that they kept on after the wolves to let off their surplus valor in imagining them Indians flying before their arms, while we went into the thicket, where a most revolting sight met our view. A spot, several yards in circumference, was trampled into a black, bloody mire, strewn with white hair, torn clothes, and the fragments of what we saw had been the body of an American boy. There was the head torn by the neck out from the shoulders, one-half the face eaten away,

and the marks of ravenous teeth scratched in white lines across the skull ; here, the bare ribs ; there, the legs torn from their sockets and stripped of flesh, except one on which a stocking still remained ; and when it was pulled off, there was the pale foot with its livid nails, entire—and the flaxen hair, clotted into locks, as the bloody brutes had shaken its tangles from their fangs, clung about the bones and to the shrubs around, whose broken twigs and red stains bore witness to the wild struggle that had so dismembered it.

I was absolutely sickened by the horrid sight, and even the rude men around me were subdued and touched ; even the Colonel's voice sank into low tones of something like sadness, as he ordered a Mexican to bring a mattock ; and we went reverently to work according to his directions, to gather up the scattered fragments and heap them together for the grave. By turns we took the mattock and silently dug away at the rude hole. That he was an American boy was all we knew, and this was enough for our sympathies. That he had been killed by the Comanches we were convinced from parts of his clothing, in which we could discover plainly the cut of a lance head, and this was enough to occupy us with stern thoughts of vengeance.

The hasty grave was finished, and the bones laid decently in such order as we could into it, and the dirt, wet with his own blood, thrown in upon them. Dust to dust, poor boy ! yours was a hideous fate indeed ! We then collected logs from every direction, and heaped them in a great pile upon the grave, to keep the wolves from digging the bones up with their paws, and turned to go back—all parties more thoroughly sobered than I should have thought it possible for such men to be.

A Mexican from the madam's rancho, and on foot, here joined us ; he told us that the Comanches had done a great deal of mischief before they reached us. In addition to a number of other murders, they had come suddenly upon a man by the name of Black, who lived some twenty miles off, when he was ploughing in the field. He was holding the plough-handles, while his son, about thirteen years of age, drove the oxen. The Indians were nearly on him before he saw them. He seized his little son by the hand and ran for life towards the house, where his rifle was.

The Indians were so close upon him, that in the hurry the little boy fell and broke the hold of his father's hand ; he looked back, and saw that if he stopped an instant to regain him, their lances would be into him—they were already standing in their stirrups to launch them—so he kept on, hoping to get his rifle in time to rescue him. He sprang into his house, and one of them was in such eager pursuit that, before he could check his headway, his horse ran its head into the door, and had nearly pitched its rider head-foremost into it. Before he could recover himself, Black had dashed out his brains with his rifle. He then sprang into the saddle of the Indian, maddened with a father's agony as he saw the rest of the party making off at full speed with his child—for only the single one had followed him after he dropped his boy. One of them, lifting the boy on the point of his lance by the clothes, had set him behind another, and they then had wheeled and cleared out, seeing, probably, what would be the result of the affair with Black.

The poor man saw they had greatly the start of him, but he gave chase alone with the desperation of frantic hope ; and frantic it proved to be, for they outstripped him far enough, and he soon lost sight of them. He then turned and made for Bexar, to get Hays's Rangers, in the hope that he should be able to intercept them before they reached the hills.

"Ah !" said the Colonel, "this is the son of poor Black we have just buried ! A most unfortunate man he has been ! This is the second son he has had killed within the year, and is the last of his family. He's a brave man, but has been foolish in always living where nobody else would dare to live ; he was living in just such a place when his other boy was killed.

"Black had a very fine horse, and the boy was riding it after cattle, when one of Agatone's men, who had been lurking about to steal it for several days, waylaid the boy, shot him, and took the horse. When he was going to live in this place, I tried to persuade him not, but to come and live nearer to me ; but he would do it ! He's a strange, wild sort of man. They say his wife, that he loved very much, was killed by the Mexicans, and that Agatone had something to do with it,—and the poor fel.

low has been a little cracked ever since ! but I don't pity a man much who would let the death of a woman crack his brain !”

Faugh ! I felt as if I could ram the butt of my gun into his mouth for the utterance of so coarse a thought ; but I remembered the scene at breakfast with the Texan, and held my peace. Such a comment was sacrilegious, upon a story which, unconsciously to him, was a most touching one. I felt a deep and sadder interest for the man at once. Such a grief was that of a strong nature—haunting him out from all social ties, to live in the constant presence of dangers which appalled other men, that he might dedicate his solitary life to past memories and vengeance. Truly was it a piteous fate to see thus cut off, one after another, the only living bonds between that love and the deep oblivion of death ! This man is an instance among many others, of the strange, passionate eccentrics to be met with on this frontier.

“ But, Colonel,” said I, “ if this be the son of Black, why should the Indians have brought him all this distance to kill him, if they intended to do it ?”

“ Oh ! they didn't intend to do it when they brought him off : they don't often kill white children when they can get them away. They adopt the boys, and make warriors of them, and value them very highly, for a number of their most distinguished war chiefs were stolen in this way ; but for the girls they care little : they take them if it is convenient, and if it isn't, they seldom kill them. They don't make wives of them, but merely slaves. They have so great contempt for the Mexicans, though, that they usually kill them—man, woman, and child. They never permit a white boy to be rescued ; and if there is any probability of this, they invariably kill him.

“ I suppose the way this thing happened was, that the Indian with the boy behind him was in the rear, and the boy hearing the guns, and thinking that friends were near, jumped off and attempted to run for it, and the Indian struck his lance into him and left him. It is a settled point with them always to do this ; for they consider that if the boy escapes them, he will become a white warrior ; but if they kill him, it is one future enemy out of the way !”

I had afterwards an opportunity of seeing this savage trait more clearly illustrated. The whole party were now assembled at the blocks of the picketing, armed and mounting, "in hot haste," for the Indian fight; and when everybody else was under way, I found myself beside the most disconsolate, wo-begone looking beast that ever it was my fortune to put eyes upon. Rosinante was an over-fed, high-conditioned steed compared with him. A starved buzzard would have scorned to pick his lean ribs, and a hungry wolf's tooth could have hardly scraped anything but hair, hide, and tendon from his hams; and there was a great disgusting sore on his back. But what was I to do? My feet were still too tender and full of thorns to think of walking. My pride would not permit me to stay behind, and the only resource left was to make the best of this wretched creature. I felt my conscience twinge me hard as the poor animal groaned when I mounted the saddle. The Lieutenant came back and gave me a "quirt," assuring me that there was a wonderful outcome in all these horses, and that I had only to ply it well to make my steed do all I wished—that I could easily keep up until we got to the Comanche camp, and then I could win a horse for myself.

This all chimed so well with my own wishes, that I commenced plying the heavy whip upon the sounding ribs of my steed; and as his unexpectedly brisk movement brought me up with the company very soon, I began to conceive that his miserable looks were all a deception, and to feel entirely merciless, as I conceived he had been playing "possum" with me in assuming them. The whole of this I was very anxious to believe, and that the saddle, though it rested upon that huge sore on his back, did not hurt him in reality, but that somehow or other he had got used to it.

Pardon me, gentle reader, for this cruel sophistry! But you must consider that, in this frontier life, all depends upon your being positively in it, when a fight occurs, for nobody takes the trouble to consider the impossibility of your getting there. If you are not there your reputation suffers. I felt all this, though I felt, too, every lash I gave the poor horse cut into my conscience. But after going a few miles, neither lashing nor any-

thing else would avail, for out of a walk he could not nor would not go.

The Colonel and all parties, who had been rather laughing at my ridiculous position before, now seriously advised that I should go back, as it was plain the horse could not hold out. But I was excited, and determined to go on and see this affair out at any rate ; so I turned my poor steed loose when I found he *could* not answer to the heaviest strokes I gave him, and determined to keep up on foot.

Several of them, seeing that go I would, proposed that I should "ride and tie" with them in turn. I was now comparatively comfortable, and had time to survey the party more critically. Antone, bearing aloft a Comanche lance, rode valorously at the head of the party, and, much to my astonishment, next to him came Davis our "Euphuist," who had rejuvenated his glories, and looked as splendid and gay as ever; and, like his peer Antone, carried simply a lance for his weapon—scorning, no doubt, in his chivalry, to take advantage of superior knowledge in fighting the poor barbarians with his own weapons. He and Antone seemed to be engaged in a bragging match, from the loud ring of their voices. Next to them followed the Mexicans, eager for the fray.

Thinking it about time we should be approaching the Medina, I took advantage of this gallant confidence, to secure my turn on horseback, of one of the heroes, who had promised me that I should ride his horse. But as we approached a portion of the road, skirted on each side by thick and scrubby undergrowth, which prevented our seeing far, and the timber before us began to thicken and look tall like that bordering upon a stream, I began to notice that the nimble horses of the Mexicans grew suddenly amazingly sluggish, and I perceived myself to be passing them one after another, although my horse was walking slowly ; and when at last there was a cry ahead of us, "There they are !" I came near to being run over and trampled by the sagacious and politic Antone hurrying back to bring up the lagging rear. He was pouring out eloquent and voluble exhortations to them to remember the glories of their ancestry, and deport themselves worthily of their high descent ; while Davis,

on the other side, was gesticulating furiously, and talking louder than Antone, though a little ahead of even him, in his anxiety to bring up the very last of the dastardly loiterers; and when they got clear to the rear, they took up their positions there—lances in rest—seemingly determined that no coward should fly, but back upon their points. My Mexican became now very clamorous for his horse: this I took occasion to quietly disregard.

Seeing things so well secured in the rear, and finding myself, by this sudden change of the order of march, pushed on to the front with my three friends, I looked out with some curiosity, not to say anxiety, upon our perspective. We were about two hundred yards from the narrow skirt of timber on the creek, and between the trunks of the trees I could see all the indications of a large encampment, in dark, half-naked men hurrying their horses together from the prairie, while others were hastily mounting. The Colonel gave the command to halt, and ordered us to see to our guns for an instant, and then raising himself in his stirrup, shouted, "Come, boys, let's into 'em!"

We were about fifty paces from the timber, which was about the same distance in width, and we had to charge through it, before we were upon the enemy, who were gathered in a confused mass a little distance beyond it. On we went, helter-skelter; and when we came through, all glowing with the ardor of battle, what was our astonishment to see the Colonel, who led us, draw up his steed suddenly, and shout to a warrior, who came galloping to meet him, with a grin of delight on his sooty face, "Why, how are you, Castro? We had like to have been into you, old fellow!—we thought you were all Comanches!"

And who was Castro? And what nation were they of—this swarthy troop—with whom the Colonel had so unexpectedly claimed acquaintance? It was, indeed, a wild-looking crew. The dark, gaunt, fierce-eyed fellows, came crowding eagerly around us; some of them not fully mounted, clinging on by one leg and hand, as they spurred their horses into the rush; others, not mounted at all, dragged their unwilling steeds by the lariat, bending forward low, in the hurry; while those fairly up, shook their bows and lances, tossing their arms in strange gyrations, and

galloped to us from every direction, clamoring their salutations to the Colonel with all their lungs.

It was a savage welcome, with a vengeance! noisy, extravagant, grotesque! The appearance of their camp was quite in keeping. For thirty or forty paces on all sides, the ground was strewn with heaps of buffalo-ropes, coils of raw-hide lassoes, bridles, bows, quivers with their arrows half emptied out, shields, skins filled with parched wheat, moccasins, bead pouches, fringed leggins, quirts, horse-tails, and every other conceivable sort of quaint, barbarous fixture.

The warriors themselves were not the least curious part of the scene—their persons naked to the clout and leggins, with bright ornaments of silver, in hands, around the wrists and neck—crescents, stars, and curious devices, pendent from their ears and from their platted hair, making the “darkness visible” of their sooty skins, more emphatic by the contrast. Most of them rode what are called “paint horses;” that is, the mustang, spotted with all the deeper colors on a milk-white ground.

And as I looked around upon this hideous, yelling mass, swaying to and fro about us—their gay feathers, long lances, white shields, dark bodies, and gleaming eyes—tossed and mingled in the strangest confusion by the plunging of their mottled steeds, it realized perfectly to me one of those vague dreams of wild and savage romance, which had been haunting my brain since childhood:

“ And thousand fantasies
Begin to throng my memory
Of calling shapes and beckoning shadows dire.”

It was soon demonstrated that we had something more than “beckoning shadows” to deal with in this case; for they almost trampled us under foot—man and horse—in the first place, and then they nearly dragged us from our seats in their unreckoning eagerness to have us get down and partake of their hospitalities.

I had by this time become so much hardened to miracles, that I quietly submitted to everything that turned up; though I was

in the most perfect ignorance all the while what it meant. Not so with the Texan. He had his gun almost to his face when the sudden recognition took place ; and though he did not quite pull the trigger, he held it still in the position for firing—turning his head quickly from side to side, with a chafed, bewildered look, as the Indians dashed up on every quarter. He could not stand the puzzle any longer, and, with a furious oath, shouted to the Colonel :

“ Tell me who these black devils are, or I’ll let into ’em !”

“ Lipans, man ! They are the Lipans—our friends ! Castro, and all of ’em, are old cronies of mine ! Keep your thunder for another time ! Look at them Mexicans, will you ?”

We turned our heads. There they were—the blood-stained veterans ! about a hundred yards off—just rallied from the flight they had commenced—Antone and Davis now at the head again ! Here they come ! They see there is to be no fight, and their valorous captains are leading them down with fierce shouts, clattering their weapons as though they intended chopping us to mince-meat. Nobody stirred to stop their headlong career, as they expected ; so they were under the disagreeable necessity of halting very suddenly themselves, some ten paces off, to ask the meaning of it all. This was done in a very savage, threatening manner, by their two ferocious leaders ; both blustering and growling at once, determined to make us all feel, by their surly obtuseness in understanding any explanation of the thing, how much we had escaped in being able to ward off their terrible exterminating charge. Castro and his warriors looked at them for a moment in contemptuous silence. The chief then turned to us with a grin.

“ Booh ! booh !” said he ; “ who them scare ? The rats in the sand ?”

We all burst into a hearty laugh at this ; while the Mexicans, seeing their sputter was “ no go,” came crowding in among us with obstreperous expressions of delight. Even the Achillean wrath of Antone and Davis was appeased at last ; changing, by slow and dignified degrees, from a scowl to a grin. They were soon launched—each for himself—into a formal oration : in which they congratulated Castro upon the lucky escape he had made in

giving the explanation just in time to save himself and party from being overwhelmed by the hot-headed impetuosity of their heroes. They shook before his eyes the lances which had been taken from the rash and unlucky Comanches, and showed how they had been bent like reeds before the tempest-track of the wrath they had provoked. They were then winding up by impressing upon him, in reiterations, the high sense of gratitude he ought to entertain and express towards the "Blessed Virgin," for her mercy in permitting him to come under the shadow of their formidable power as allies, not leaving him and his nation exposed, as the wretched and outcast Comanches were, to the tornadoes of Mexican ire ! This rather capped the climax of any display I had yet witnessed of the surprising powers of Master Antone.

Just picture to yourself the tall, erect, and martial form of the Indian warrior ; and then, a few paces in front of him, the shrivelled figure of Antone, standing in his stirrups, leaning forward, in his eagerness, over the horse's neck ; his hat off, his lean, yellow face upturned, his chin and long sharp nose pointing to the zenith, his little black eyes glowing, his wide mouth clattering like a mill-clapper, every sentence

" A bombast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war,"

enforced by his rapid gesticulation ; changing the lance from one hand to the other ; now making it sing again, as he whirled it in the air ; now striking it fiercely against the saddle. He even forgot his old enemy, the Texan, so intensely was he absorbed in bearing down poor Castro to the very earth by the torrent of his eloquence ; when, suddenly, a lance from that same merciless hand was so sharply thrust into his posterior, that—biting a word in two—the pain caused him to make a convulsive spring which carried him over his horse's head, and landed him most ignominiously on his nose, in the burrow of a sand-rat, amidst a simultaneous roar of laughter, in which even the stoical warriors joined.

Davis retreated very suddenly ; and as the chop-fallen knave gathered himself up, sputtering the blood and sand from his mouth,

and slunk off to the water to repair damages, he was followed by reiterated peals. I thought Texas would go into actual convulsions: he slid from his horse and rolled upon the grass in a perfect spasm of merriment; and the Colonel, I think, approached nearer to the verge of a genuine laugh, than I ever saw him before or afterwards. The Indians enjoyed it highly, though laughing is not a national amusement with them; but they entered into the whole spirit of the thing; for they were brave, shrewd men, and felt, perhaps, a more unmitigated contempt for the Mexicans than even we did.

The hubbub of merriment subsided, we yielded to the solicitations of Castro and dismounted. Buffalo-rugs were spread on the ground, and we were very promptly seated in comfort, and feasting with these men we had been so near a fatal collision with a few moments before. They had built no fires, for fear the smoke might betray them to the Comanches, of whose presence in the country they were aware. Our repast was light, simple, and nutritious; such as the southern Indians always carry with them on their expeditions. It consisted merely of dried beef and venison pounded up fine, that it might occupy as little space as possible in their packs, and Mexican wheat, parched and then coarsely ground between two stones. This last we mixed with water from the river and drank. This food is highly nutritious, and easily carried; and the Indians will endure immense hardships, for a long time, on it alone. The necessities of their wild helter-skelter lives have taught *them* to settle down upon the two articles, of all others, used by man for food, which analytical chemistry has taught *us* to contain the greatest amount of alimentary matter compressible into the smallest space.

It is a curious fact that men will endure a greater amount of fatigue, and for a greater length of time, on this than on any other known diet. The hunters, trappers, and Indians, all agree in asserting this, and my experience goes to confirm it. The meal, which had been dispatched in rather formal silence, being finished, Castro arose, as the politicians say, to define his position. He was a fine-looking fellow, straight as the stem of a palm; his limbs exquisitely developed. There was a light and elegant finish about his whole frame, that I scarcely ever saw approached—an

expression of bounding elasticity that cannot be conveyed. His face was after "the high old Roman fashion," his forehead broader and better developed than I ever noticed an Indian's before ; and the circlet of eagle's feathers set back upon it, the flash of his large black eye, and the play of his wide, thin nostril, gave to his whole air a fierce alertness and wild magnanimity, which would have consummated the poet's ideal of nature's tameless chivalry—a nursling of the sun and storms—a knight of the sea-like waving plains—quick in the chase and battle as the grey-hawk's arrowy stoop—merciless, strong, and terrible in beauty as the glossy panther. He was much distinguished, too, above his tribe, by the richness of his ornaments, which were of pure silver, banded, and hung upon his dusky skin in great profuseness. Tufts of red-stained horse-hair, and scarlet feathers, set off his lance, and bow, and belts,—one of which last crossed his swelling chest and sustained the full and gaily decorated quiver behind : another around his waist bore the long hunting-knife, and held in its place, the most unpoetical and ineuphaneous "breech-clout ;" and to this was attached, by thongs, the leggins, which came up to his knees, the white buckskin of which they were made, marked with angular figures in red and black paint, and cut into a wide fringe behind ; again, to these were attached the moccasins, made of the same material, neatly fringed, and worked with beads, by the fingers of some dusky maiden. At his feet lay his bow, and the oval shield made of skin from the necks of buffalo bulls, tanned to a shining, white surface, bearing, like the shields of all other knights, his coat of arms, painted in strange hieroglyphics, that told the story of his feats.

His warriors, to the number of sixty, accoutred in something like the same style, though much less handsomely, were grouped around us in grave silence, looking up to his face with respectful attention, when, with a graceful though stately nod to the Colonel, he commenced :

"Brodder ! the big war-chief," nodding to us, "and white brodders ! Lipans are strong braves ! they no forget ! So much times," holding up the fingers of both hands, "the grass has been pale, Castro and his braves know the big war-chief. He very much brave ; his heart much full of blood—his hand very red.

He strikes like the Great-Spirit fire ! the Comanch fall, the Mexican fall—many papooses weep. He learn Castro much to fight. Castro he now big war-chief, too. The Comanch take your horse ! Castro will take his scalp ! The big war-chief must have his horse ; Castro will bring it ! The trail is on the grass. Lipans see sharp. They are ravens. Many hours they are gone. Lipans are swift. They are long-eared rabbits—run more long than wolves ! Comanch has much good horse. Lipan horse run like wild goose fly. Go sleep ! Castro will bring you scalps—all you horse ! So much,” holding up four fingers, “ times the sun go, the big war-chief and white brodders see Castro ! Comanch big cowards ! Lipans hate cowards ! Damn ! Castro will whip Comanch ! Lipans can whip squaws !”

The warriors sprang to their feet at the conclusion of this oration, and danced, and yelled, and clattered their lances against their shields for a few moments, and then suddenly scattering, every man to his horse, in an incredibly short time they were all mounted, everything in its place, and ready to be off.

The Colonel shook hands with the young chief, saying, “ Castro is brave—he has fought by my side ! The Lipans are like white warriors ! Good-bye ! Go it, my fine fellow, you are game and no mistake !”

We gave them three cheers, which they answered with the war-whoop, and scurried off at full speed over the plain—and a wild, light-heeled, fierce-hearted crew were they ! Antone and Davis galloped along with them for a half-mile, making more fuss and fierce demonstrations than any warrior of them all ; but after they had wounded the inoffensive air by a sufficient number of ferocious thrusts at some phantom foe, to convince the Indians how severely they would deal with one of flesh, they wheeled out of the crowd, and came galloping back to us with all the conscious bearing of heroes.

We now set out for home—the Texan grumbling that he had been disappointed in a fight !—the Mexicans swaggering about what they *would* have done—that is, Antone and Davis being mouthpieces of the common sentiment !—while the Colonel and myself jogged along very cosily together—he in his usual gossiping mood, and I a good listener !

"The Lipans," said he, "were once a formidable nation. They have held a desperate feud with the Comanches since the flood, for all I know; and after we came here to take possession of the country, we found them one of the most unmanageable tribes in it. We had some furious fights with them. Between the Texas rifles and the lances of the Comanches, they had been thinned out amazingly, though they were still so troublesome that the boys got together at last to exterminate them—tear them up root and branch! Though at the time there was a sort of truce between us, the boys crept on their camp, near Labaca Bay, one morning about daybreak, and firing upon it, then went into a regular wholesale slaughter of men, women, and children. They fought like devils as soon as they got their eyes open—for they were sleeping like logs when the Texans fired on them. But it all wouldn't do, and they were killed—the whole of them, but these sixty warriors and a few women who made their escape. The Comanches got wind of it, and hoping to wreak on this weakened remnant the vengeance they had been waiting for, upon the tribe, they pressed them so hard that the wretched creatures came to us for protection. They swore to be our fast friends for ever, if we would save them from extermination! We drove off the Comanches, and since that time the Lipans have been faithful and very useful to us. It was like a cur licking the hand that beat him; but they knew there was a greater chance of mercy for them, with us, than with their old enemies.

"Indians hate where their fathers hated hotter than devils. Castro was a youngster then—but he's got the heart of a white man in him. He saw me in a fight with the Comanches once, and came to me and wanted me to tell him the charm that would make him fight like me. He wouldn't believe it when I told him there was no conjuration about it, and wouldn't leave me for six months after, night or day. Every fight we had, he kept by my side, watching every movement I made, thinking I had concealed the spell from him, and determined to find it out. He would go wherever I did, it mattered not what the danger was; and I have frequently been amused to see how closely he would watch me. In the hottest of a fight—instead of attending to his own defence—his eyes would be curiously observing the slightest thing I did, and imitat-

ing it then, himself. When he met with Captain Hays of Bexar—who is the most daring and successful ranger we ever had on the frontier—I thought the fellow would go crazy with delight. He almost worships him! and for a year or two, he never left him: and the boys used to say, it was nip and tuck between Jack—as they called Hays—and Castro, who would do the most fool-hardy things. His tribe soon selected him their war-chief, as the old chief, his father, was now getting too stiff to lead them. And though he never found out the secret of the ‘spell,’ as he thought it was, yet in the search for it he became one of the most bold and headlong warriors I have ever known.

“The boys tell a good story about him! Every rash thing Hays did—and he did a plenty of ‘em—Castro would forthwith do something just as rash, and a little more so if possible. He was along with Hays and his party of ten Rangers, on an expedition to the Rio Grande once, and they very unexpectedly came in view of a troop of eighty Mexican cavalry. There seemed to be no chance for it but to fight, great as the difference in number was, or be taken; and such an idea never, for once, entered into Hays’ calculations.

“The Mexican Colonel rode out some distance in advance of his men, and very insolently ordered Hays to surrender. The parties were about three hundred yards apart. Hays coolly turned to his men, and said, ‘Sit still, boys, I’ll fix that chap!’ They were so accustomed to his odd ways that they obeyed, and let him ride on alone, to meet the Mexican officer. The officer thought he was coming for a parley, and approached him off his guard. It happened that Hays was riding a wild young horse that was not accustomed to firing. He forgot this, though, and supposing it was his old horse, when he got in about eighty paces of the officer, jerked his rifle suddenly to his face, and tumbled him off. The young horse, desperately frightened, ran off with him, and carried him like a streak clear through the Mexican line. They were so much astonished at the rapidity of the thing, and the fall of their leader, that they did not attempt to interrupt him, and he passed through unhurt. Castro, when he saw this, instantly put spurs to his horse—for he thought it was a bravado feat, and was determined not to be laid in the shade. So all alone he came

charging down upon the Mexicans too ; but they had by this time somewhat recovered from their stupor, and gave him a little hotter reception than Hays had met—though they were most thoroughly confounded by this new mode of fighting. They closed around Castro, who fought like a wild-cat, and soon unhorsed him, with a half dozen wounds ; and, but that the Rangers, just in time, dashed in to his rescue, he would have been cut to pieces.

“ The Mexicans never got over the confusion these two extraordinary sallies produced, and were badly whipped. After they got through tying the prisoners, Hays stumbled upon Castro, lying bruised, bleeding, and almost insensible, under the feet of their horses. He stooped by him, thinking he was mortally wounded, and took his hand affectionately. Castro opened his eyes, and seeing who it was, said, smilingly, as he closed them again, ‘ Ah, Captain Jack ! you be too much brave for poor Castro ! he no go through the hell like you ! ’

“ It was a long time before the brave and simple-hearted fellow got over it, and when he did get well, he merely answered the joke that was current about the affair, saying, ‘ The white chief no more shall beat Castro for the laugh.’ ” I was much delighted with the story of this gallant knight of the “ Order ” of Nature.

CHAPTER X.

THE DANCING BEAR.

WHEN we reached home, we found a ragged, tow-headed boy, who looked as if he might have been white once, and who had been sent as *page d'amour*—I suppose—by the old Madame Cavillo, to request the honor of the presence of her *dear* friend the Colonel, and his friends, at her grand fandango, to be given that night. The Colonel was in great glee in anticipation of this frolic. Very much to my astonishment, he endeavored to dissuade me from going.

"My boy," said he, "you are too imprudent! You will get into a row over there, if you go! It's going to be a ticklish evening. The old woman wants a quarrel with me any how, and if there are too many Americans there, she will make that an excuse."

"I like that coming from you," I said, laughing. "It sounds rather funny to hear you preaching prudence, after what you did yesterday."

"Well! well!" said he, with a grin; "but I am in earnest! I have especial reasons for thinking that it will be the safest for all parties that you and Texas shouldn't go there to night. I wish you would stay; your feet are too sore to dance, any how."

This was true; I was too much used up to enjoy the thing, and felt half disposed not to go at any rate. But Texas swore bluntly that go he would; though the Colonel continued to remonstrate and persuade, he was not to be moved. I thought there was something odd about this excessive anxiety to have us stay

behind ; but I was too much worried to think about it especially, and threw myself upon my buffalo robe for a nap.

I was waked by the glare of a light in my face. On looking up, I saw it was caused by the boy who brought the message from old madam. This boy was a singular animal. The Colonel had told me concerning him—that his parents, who had been frontier people, were both killed while he was quite small, by the Comanches, and he taken prisoner ; that after keeping him among them for a year or so, the Indians had brought him back with them on an expedition against this settlement ; that the boy, in a very daring style, had jumped down from behind the warrior who had charge of him in the midst of a fight, and made his escape by running to the Rancho of Madam Cavillo, although riddled by half a dozen arrows in the effort ; that since, he had lived a sort of jackal-life, from house to house, owned by no one, kicked and cuffed on all sides, mocking and stealing from everybody—the Mexicans hating him because he was white, and the whites—who had ever seen him—taking no interest in him, because of his wild, curious habits, and a character for faithlessness. He lived, in a word, “a vagabond upon the face of the earth.”

The night had set in very dark, and he had built a fire to roast some meat by, which he had pilfered from the Colonel's pork-barrel. It was a sketch for the pencil of Cruikshank—that boy with his “unkempt hair—his looped and windowed raggedness,” crouching over the flickering blaze, one hand before his face, to protect it from the heat, the other holding a great slice of fat pork to toast on the end of a sharp stick ; and in the entire abstraction of his task—his thick and flabby lip fallen upon his chin, and dripping with saliva—while the dense and gloomy shadows rose and fell, and leaped and danced about him, from the uncertain flame. I watched him for a few minutes, and then called him—“John !” He sprang to his feet with a sneaking, guilty look, and endeavored to conceal his theft, until he found it was of no use ; then putting an impudent face upon the matter, he broke out into a loud and shrill laugh.

“Ha ! ha ! old Red-head wanted yer to stay to-night to keep his things from being stealed by his woman—did he ?

“ ‘ Snake baked de hoe-cake—
 Set de frog to mind it—
 Frog went to sleep—
 Lizard come and stole it.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! went to sleep, Mr. Frog, did you ? ”

He accompanied this elegant ditty with a Jim Crow sort of shuffle, and psalmody whine through his nose.

“ What do you mean, you scamp, by his woman wanting to steal his things ! ” said I—a good deal amused by this cute fashion of getting out of a scrape.

“ Lor ! ain’t you hearn yit ? Why, he went and tuck her by the hair and dragged her out’en her old dad’s house, and he wool-ed her, and he larruped her, and he stomped her ! He licked her nasty, now I tell you ! May-be he warn’t in a rarin tarin tantrum ! and all just because the yaller slut got scairt and swom ’cross the river when the Injuns comed ! He’s a regular bustin’ old devil ! When he gits a guine, thar’s sumph’en to pay, sure as fallin’ off a log ! He was afeared she and her kin-folks would come stealin’ away her things to-night, and take his’n with ’em. That’s the reason why he was a beggin’ you to be tired, and stay here to-night. He ! he ! you ain’t sharper nor a fox’s nose, any how !

“ ‘ Frog went asleep—
 Lizard come and stole it.
 Bring back my hoe-cake,
 You long-tailed nannie ! ”

He was in the act of bouncing out of the door, with this chorus on his lips—or in his nose, rather—when I intercepted him.

“ Not so fast, my bright boy ! I want you to show me how to get across the river. I shall go up to the Rancho ! ”

“ Well, won’t you tell old Red-head about the hog-meat, and git me licked ? ”

“ Never mind about the meat ; but if you don’t show me right, about getting over that log, I shall have to lick you myself ! ”

“ You catch a skunk afore you eat him—don’t you ? ” said he with a saucy grin.

The rascal seemed to be a perfect Flibbertigibbet ; and, as I

knew it would be impossible to find the crossing place, dark as it was, without his piloting, I propitiated him with a present of tobacco, got my gun and side arms, and we were off in a minute—he dancing with all sorts of antics before me—flourishing his chunk of meat over his head, between the mouthfuls he tore off from it, mumbling out snatches of curious rhyme—imitations of the wild sounds of the wood and prairie.

The night was dark enough anywhere, but when we descended to the last bank of the river, where the timber was very tall and heavy, it was the blackness of darkness; the huge trunks of the cotton woods themselves could not be distinguished near the ground. The heavy ripple of the deep, rapid stream, was loud and threatening—it seemed to me right at our feet, and I felt all the time as if the next step would take me into it. I was guided only by the sound of the boy's step and his voice, which he took care should be loud enough, and strange enough, too, to wake hollow, screeching, and every other sort of echo, in multiplied reverberations. A huge owl flapped its damp wing close by my ear, and answered him in a hoot so stunningly loud, that my heart fairly jumped again. The boy laughed and shouted—

“ The Injun says—too-whoo ! too-whoo !
 The old owl says—too-whoo ! too-whit !
 Hunter, watch ! he is fooling you !
 Arrows are keen, as well as wit ! ”

The chorus to this curious snatch was taken up in hootings and screeches, on every side, until it seemed to me that the woods were alive with owls—the gloomy shadows literally torn and quaking with the discord of pipes of every calibre, and the rattle ! rattle ! snap ! snap ! of angry beaks. The wolves, too, put in as choristers, and the boy led off again—

“ The red wolf says, whoo !—ooh ! whoo—ah !
 The Injun says, whoo !—ooh ! whoo !—oo !
 Though Injun miss'd the figure thar,
 Look-out ! His arrow is more true ! ”

His imitations of the voices of the animals were so complete, that they answered him—the waves of sound swelling louder,

more prolonged, until there was a very tempest of dolors, pouring from a hundred howling, hooting, screeching throats, that was positively infernal. I felt oppressed and restless. There was something awful in these moaning, hideous articulations of the deep night—coming as they did, in multiplied, rebounding echoes, through the wide and forest-tangled jaws of darkness! And this imp of the wilds who was leading me! There was nothing in his reckless deviltry at all calculated to make me feel more comfortable; and when he shouted “Here’s the log! look sharp!”—I was altogether doubtful whether he did not intend to play me some elfish trick. It was a perilous passage—almost as bad as Mahomet’s Hair Bridge to the Seventh Heaven. It was a single and very slim tree, fallen across the river, and that, too, at a very steep angle; and how to pass it, in this Egyptian gloom, rather puzzled me!

“You’ve got to take it coon-fashion—on all fours,” said my guide. “Hang close with your claws!”

It looked like a hazardous game indeed! crawling through the intense blackness on my hands and knees up that narrow and trembling bridge—above the fierce rush of the deep, fretful current. I made the venture; and you may conceive how foolish I felt, suspended over the mad waters, the laugh of that strange boy commingling with their eager turbulence. I managed to get across, though, at last, and when I looked back, could faintly distinguish his grotesque figure, leaping and swinging above the angry chaos. We climbed the hill and were soon at the Rancho. It would be difficult for an American to realize the characteristics of the odd scene that met my view.

Passing through the great gate, I was introduced to the square open court—an area of about a quarter of an acre—the low stone houses, on its four sides, lit by rushlights and resounding with music. In the middle of the court itself was a great fire, over which swung a mighty kettle of coffee; near it stood tubs of “chickerones”—and women, with long hair hanging loose upon their shoulders, were snatching “tortillas” from the hot stones as they became done, and heaping them in piles around. There were at least five hundred Mexicans crowding, shouting, and jabbering and feasting, in the open space—the men in white

cotton shirts, loose trousers, and the "Serape"—the women in striped "robesos" of the same material thrown like a veil over their heads. Every one—men, women, and children—holding in one hand a tin cup, which was replenished occasionally from the kettle of coffee—and in the other a tortilla and chickerones.

The presence of my sprightly guide among them was very suddenly apparent from the increased confusion and hubbub. I elbowed my way through the dense, noisy throng, to a low, long room, from which the sounds of revelry seemed to proceed most obstreperously. I succeeded, after a good deal of trouble, in establishing my position just inside the door, and there a most comical scene presented itself.

The most conspicuous figures among a crowd of dancers, were the Colonel and old Señora Cavillo. He in a blanket coat—his pantaloons' stuck into the tops of the long clumsy boots I had given him—was stamping it through the "Jarabo" (a country dance), dragging after him the old Señora, who flung out with amazing vivacity her lean and slippered shanks: her parchment face wrinkled with affectionate simpers, and her keen little black eyes leering most lovingly at her gay Lothario. I thought she meant to kiss him—she gazed so passionately at him! She looked the Venus of an infernal revel!

Close behind this exquisite couple came Texas, bouncing and curveting till his head almost touched the ceiling, dragging after him a thumping Mexican damsel. Davis was there, too, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form"—the focus of all attraction—killing and gorgeous as ever! But I was most amused at the Lieutenant. His wife—who was really a very pretty woman—seemed to be perfectly victimized by the transcendent attractions of Davis; while the poor husband stood gloomily in a corner—a just impersonation of the "green-eyed monster," watching their billing and cooing with a despairing, vindictive look.

I was astonished to hear such fine music—for the Mexicans have some stirring and fantastic airs among their national music. Their dances are singularly mazy and complicated—some that I witnessed were very graceful, but the favorite fandango is a most listless, monotonous, thump-e-te-thump of the feet

of a single couple placed opposite to each other, while the rest of the company are mere "lookers-on in Verona." It is associated with old Mexican superstitions. The women were costumed in a style in which antiquated American fashions and semi-barbarous Mexican tastes were oddly blended. The Mexican dandies were all of them arrayed with the same bastard whimsicality.

On the whole, it was a curious, grotesque scene. Attracted by a sudden commotion in the crowd outside, I turned my head. Standing close to me, in the faint light, were two men wrapped in dark cloaks; the silver gleam of the stiletto and pistols showed through the darkness, and a dangerous light of sharp fierce eyes glistened beneath the broad shade of their "sombrosos." I felt instantly that there was fear in this sudden apparition. They looked like the two horsemen of the morning before. I stepped to the Colonel and whispered my suspicions.

"I thought so," said he.

And almost prostrating the old Señora in his hurry, he rushed out, six-shooter in hand! But the two strangers had taken the hint, and were already swinging open the great gate. He followed them, prostrating everything in his way. I attempted to follow, but the multitude of Péons outside interfered, until the gleam of my long knife above their heads made them give way. I got through just in time to see the Colonel fire through the darkness after two men on horseback, who were clattering away down the hill.

It would have amused one—had there not been something in its exhibition too strong and fierce to be laughed at—to witness the unavailing, champing, foaming fury of the Colonel, as the retreating figure of his enemy was lost in the darkness. He fired his gun twice after him, even when he was far enough out of view. Then stamping and shouting, he dashed the butt of his precious "six-shooter" against the ground, to the evident peril of its integrity.

He was rushing back, swearing he intended to make his way to the old Señora, and speak his mind to her, in no very measured terms, about harboring and encouraging a villain like Agatone, to the peril and annoyance of her neighbors, when the great gate of the court was slammed heavily in his face, and the

bolts drawn. He dashed his broad shoulders against it like a mad buffalo, and bellowed and roared in his baffled wrath, about as musically as that animal would have done, when, in its blind fury, it had crushed its horns against some sturdy oak, behind which its subtle assailant—the hunter—had glided. But it all would not avail! The massive gate was no more to be moved than would the strong oak have been. And after expending his strength in what the western men call “rearing and charging,” until he was perfectly exhausted, he listened to my entreaties, and consented to start for home. The man was dreadfully excited, and staggered as we descended the hill.

The night had been very dark when I came over; but “glimpses of the moon” visited us now, occasionally, through rifted clouds, which, in vast, gloomy, and ragged masses, were careering as if—possessed by the winged life of fear—they fled across the heavens silently from some weird foe. There has always been something awful to me in the noiseless hurrying of these black mighty phantoms. Haste!—haste! faster!—faster! they seem to say, as one huge shape rushes upon another, and yet no sound! The ear expects it; you listen for the crash! But no! your heart beats very loud; there is no voice from that great driving chaos! The silent majesty of motion! the mute power that whirls, through burning mazes, the fire-dance of stars, is seen and felt in the sublimity of such a scene.

When we were a short distance from the house, I heard the quick patter of feet pursuing. Before I could look behind, the boy, John, throwing himself rapidly past in a bounding somerset, was standing face to face a few paces in front of us.

“Get out of my way!” growled the Colonel furiously, striking at him. “You hell-cat; you skunk; you muskrat! you smell of Mexicans; and if you are white, that only makes it worse! A white boy to let his carcass be kicked and cuffed about like a slunk pig, by the Mexicans! You ought to go and starve with the wolves first! I’d pick a buzzard’s bones with my teeth rather! Don’t get in my reach, or I’ll stamp you into the earth!”

The boy, who seemed desperately afraid of the bear in his

surly mood, by leaping and rolling together, down the hill, had placed himself far enough out of reach in an instant.

"But, Kurnal," he said, from his safe position, in cowed, whining accents, "I jist comed to tell yer——"

"You lie, you bat! You have lied to me and to the Mexicans both! I don't want to hear you. Clear out, I say!" And he jerked his gun up to his face.

The woods fairly trembled to his angry roar. The boy, quick as lightning, threw himself on the ground, and rolling off the last bank, the next moment we heard the splash of his strugglings with the dark rapid waters.

"Colonel, the boy will drown. See what your stupid anger has done!"

"Drown! There's no hope of that; you'd as well talk of drowning a mink. I wish there was some chance for it!"

By this time I had reached the bank the boy had been standing on, and which overlooked the bed of the river. By the faint light on the ripples, I could distinguish a small, black object, about thirty paces below me, which seemed to be moving rapidly down the middle of the current. With a splash, it instantly disappeared under the water, as I came in view; and though I ran down the edge of the stream for some distance, and called to him eagerly, I could hear and see nothing more. I felt somewhat alarmed for the boy's life; for the river, besides being deep and swift, was full of sharp snags.

The Colonel called after me with a jeering "Haw! haw! you are throwing away trouble and shedding sweat for nothing! I tell you, you green-horn, a hundred men couldn't drown him in that river!"

I stopped to wait till he should come up; for the log we were to cross on was some distance further down. Just before he joined me, I thought I could distinguish the sound of snapping twigs on the other side, but the gloom under the heavy forest was too impenetrable to distinguish anything. I said nothing about it, thinking it might be some wild animal, and we walked on. I remonstrated angrily with him about the brutal impolicy of his treatment of the boy, for he evidently had something of importance to communicate; but I might as well have spent my

breath to the trees ; for he seemed to have forgotten the very existence of John, and I could get nothing out of him but threats and curses about Agatone and old Señora Cavillo.

We had now arrived at the log. I have before spoken of this perilous passage ; and going down it from this side was worse than climbing it from the other. We stopped, and the Colonel, who was accustomed to the passage, proposed to go first and show me how to cross. While we stood for a moment to sling our guns upon our backs, we were startled by a stealthy rustle and cracking in the woods beyond. The moon had just thrown a pale gleam of light upon our figures and upon the log. We both stepped instantly back into the shade and listened breathlessly. The low howl of a wolf very close to us swung dismally out on the stillness. We drew our breaths again ; at the same moment we heard a voice which I recognised for John's, and which seemed to be some distance off, singing :

“ The red wolf says, whoo-oooh ! whoo-ah !
 The robber says, whoo-oooh ! whoo-oooh !
 Look out ! look out ! a trigger's thar ;
 Look out ! it will be pulled on you ! ”

I suspected what the warning meant at once, and endeavored to stop the Colonel, who was hurrying towards the log again, with the exclamation, “ Pish ! it's nothing but a wolf and that cursed boy again ! ” but it was too late. Just as he stepped into the moonlight, a long phizz-ziz and a bright flash, from the dense shadows on the other side, were followed by a heavy thumping report, such as a Mexican escopet always makes. The Colonel sprang back with the exclamation, “ Ha ! it blowed, did it ! ” while I, who was somewhat prepared by my previous suspicions, fired instantly at the flash !

The Colonel started down the log at a run, but the same drizzling rain which had dampened the powder of the assassin and made the gun hang fire, had made the log slippery ; and his headlong leaps had carried him more than half across the trembling bridge, when his foot slipped and he was plunged into the water. I followed without an instant's reflection, and with, perhaps, more instinctive caution, and reached the other side in

safety. The Colonel shouted to me, sputtering the mud and water from his mouth, "Follow that fellow—I'm safe, or will be when I get out!" It occurred to me that he was quite able to take care of himself, so I followed at full speed in the direction of the retreating footsteps. It was too late though, and after nearly knocking the side of my face off against a tree, and having my head almost jerked from my shoulders by thorny vines it was impossible to guard against in the dark, I halted pretty much out of breath, and nothing the wiser for my chase, though something the worse, for I could feel hot drops trickling down my neck, and the sting of the sharp thorns that had been dragged across it.

After a short time I heard the Colonel approaching, plunging and tearing through the bushes like a worried bear through canebrakes. By the time he reached me, he was pretty well done up; the sudden ducking had very thoroughly cooled him off, and he now began to feel the bruises he had received, and the reaction of the various excitements of the evening, and for a little while was comparatively tame. It now occurred to me, for the first time, to wonder what had become of Texas. I asked the Colonel what he thought of it. He answered me, between his long pantings, "Pooh! never mind Texas!" Three or four pants and a long-drawn breath—"That cursed Agatone!"—pant—"thought he had me!" Panting—"Too much occupied with hugging that fat—" Long breaths again—"Set him there to plug me on that log, did he!" Still louder and hoarser, catching his breath—"Ooh! I could tear him with my teeth!" A longer pause—"Texas wouldn't hear the guns, and don't know anything about it. I must stop and rest!" Down he dropped upon a log. "If that gun hadn't blowed, I'd 'av been a gone'er, sure! Why didn't you hit!"

"I did my best, you know."

"Yes, yes; but why wa'n't your best better?"

"You are unreasonable as usual, man. It was all guess-work, in the dark!"

"Yes, he'll come out as soon as he gets tired of the dance, and the girl, and the liquor. You and he must start to-morrow at day-break and bring Hays. We'll hunt Agatone this time to

the death, or I'll leave the country ! No I won't—I'll catch him. We can't help catching him ; Hays and the Bravo are perfect bloodhounds. I'll follow him across the Rio Grande but I'll have him ! I'll kill my horse !—I'll walk till my feet give out—then I'll crawl on my knees across the desert prairie and chew snails to live on—but I'll have him ! Hell ! I'll hunt him into its black jaws but I'll lap his heart's blood !” And, calling down a terrible imprecation on his own head if he didn't do all this, he sprang to his feet and said, abruptly,

“Come on.”

There was something absolutely imposing in the tameless cataract of passion this man's nature exhibited ; and had it not been so thoroughly bestialized, it would have been almost sublime.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRAIRIE SCOUT.

WE reached the house without another word being spoken between us. We were astonished to see, through the chinks, the blaze of a cheerful fire. As we entered, the figure of a very tall personage met us. I heard a drawling voice say,

"How are yer, Kern?"

"Bill Johnson! Blood and blazes! Glad to see you, old fellow! What brought you here? Just the boy I wanted!"

"Oh, jest sneakin' around! Anything er stirrin'?"

"I tell you, boy, yes; I have just taken a pop at Agatone. One of his men took one at me down on the log. Did you hear the gun?"

"Jest as usual; one er them yaller stinks can't hit a bluff-side! I hearn the gun—thought thar were sumthen out. Who is this?" turning to me.

"Oh, that's Kentuck; we're going to make something of him; he stands powder well, but wants a heap of practice."

"He! he! gin us your feelers, Kentuck; we'll work the buttermilk outen yer! Glad yer come! From old Tennersee myself, and them's close sisterine yer know. Turn that meat, thar, Kern! You keeps mighty triflin' fires; but you poor creatures where live in 'houses can't have a fire like men ought'er. Squat yourselves, boys, and make yerselves at home while I'm er'eatin'; I ain't tuck nothin' since yester' evenin', and then I tuck it raw dry, 'cause a fire wa'n't safe!"

"Fresh signs?" asked the Colonel, as he stooped and cut a great slice from the venison ham which was spitted before the fire.

"I could'er almost smelt 'em!" said Bill, as he went through the same manœuvre.

"I found yer coffee, Kern, though yer does keep it in a cussed sly place. Mexicans bad, are they? Mighty bad thing having people living 'bout, jest ter thief."

But the Colonel's jaws were too busy by this time for further talk, and he merely nodded his head. Bill, who had now, too, cut off a slice of meat weighing about a pound from the ham, and passed it on, with a significant look, to me, then seized upon the quart-cup of coffee which was simmering hot, and commenced in solemn silence his meal.

Now, amidst the deep stillness, broken only by the doleful sound of the voices of night without, and the crashing of their heavy grinders, let us take a good look at Bill Johnson—the boy, as the Colonel called him. And a rough seeming customer was he—worth taking a second look at—especially if you felt any temptation to cross his track. He was upwards of six feet four in height; an angular, loose-jointed figure, that looked as if it had been thrown together by a pitchfork, and did not care whether it stayed thrown together or not; his bones, though, were prodigiously massive, and his hand felt to me like lead. There was not the sixtieth part of a grain of surplus flesh upon him. His tendons, muscles, and even veins, were as rigorously defined as if they had been cut in granite. Upon his wide, massy shoulders was set a very small head, with a fleece of close-curled black hair. His features were small and well shaped, with a full, frank black eye; his skin, stretched so tight as it was over the bones, reminded me, in color and consistence, of a drum-head. He was dressed in a black, greasy, buckskin suit, "a world too wide," which appeared as though it had weathered a thousand storms, and kept pace with the progressive tanning of his own cuticle.

In a word, sun and winds, perils by flood and field, and starvation, altogether, had hardened the man into a perfect whale-bone state! He had lain aside his wolf-skin cap and bullet-pouch, and in the belt of his hunting shirt were stuck two or three knives of different sizes and lengths, and a brace of long rifle-pistols. The charger of alligators' teeth hung at his breast,

along with the coiled wire tube-picker. Of beard he had none whether he had plucked it out, as the Indians do, or never had one, I cannot tell. But such as he is—this was Bill Johnson, the guide, hunter, trapper—the man who knew, as well as he knew “Old Sue,” his rifle, every peak along the chain of the Rocky Mountains—who visited Astoria merely as a pleasure-jault to see the boys, and hug his old friends the grizzly bears—who luxuriated his summers at the Steamboat Springs, with his head upon the lap of his Delilah—a captured Blackfoot squaw!—who took Santa Fé as “mine inn” on his way to spend the winter on the pampas of California—who was proof against wind and hail, and all tornadoes, and joyed

“On the snow-wreath to battle with the wolf;”—

whose hide could glance the arrow of a Souix—whose eye would see the Condor first, and rifle bring it from its icy peaks—whose spring was agile as the long-fleeced goat’s—whose foot was tireless as the Huron runner’s—who could outstarve the raven, and look greasy where the jackalls died—whose fist could crush a puma’s skull—whose stab was quicker than the thought of death—whose hate was greedy as an eagle’s maw—whose face was mild and simple as a country boy’s—whose heart was frank as any maiden’s, and quite as free of guile—who worshipped God unconsciously in daily walk and converse with his grandeur, yet would have laughed at all religions!

Such was Bill Johnson; and so are many others of those majestic natures, whose souls grow like the shadows of the mountain ridges they walk beneath—“wild above rule or art”—rugged but sublime! And yet that man’s hand was red, and many a ruthless blow of retributive vengeance it had struck. Society would shudder at the bare recital of many a deed he had smiled in doing. Yet while in your “fenced cities” you have the gallows—your huge castellated prisons, your houses of discipline, your narrow cells where, shut from the free air and holy sun, the wretched sinner against your laws must tell the weary seconds on through years, until the inward light goes out and death strikes twice—you should not find fault with these men, to whom “conscience is as for a law;” you have given them none; and

since the systems you boast of, and have framed in pride, offer you no alternative but to make justice an executioner, blame them not if, as they have no ideal incorporation on which to throw the blame—to which they can say, “on your shadowy head be the blood of this man; we wash our hands of it”—they should more honestly take the retribution into their own hands, and each man for himself be the executioner of its stern law.

You cannot judge of the fierce wrongs which heat their strong passions to the fever-thirst for blood and vengeance. It is a battle for life—for ever—on these desolate wilds, of man to man, eye to eye, and foot to foot. Yet they have a code—though a relentless and martial one it be—written in the constitution of their natures, and the circumstances of their position.

“Trust me—each state must have its policies—
Kingdoms have edicts—cities have their charters—
And even the wild outlaw, in his forest walks,
Keeps yet some touch of civil discipline.”

By this code they are most sacredly bound. This common law of conscience and of individual rights needs no wily counsellor to distort its meaning and confound its sense; but each one, with the majesty of nature looking down upon him from her eternal hills, and under the broad gaze of the great eye of heaven, manfully and stoutly, of his own responsibility, interprets for himself, and is his own executive!

“Ye’r goin’ to see after him some, in the mornin’, Kern?”
For the bone was picked pretty clean by this time.

“I tell you we are, Bill! The boys will bring Hays and ten men; and now we’ve got you, I wouldn’t take a hundred mules for the chance!”

“I don’t care, but I’ll be thar. Yer know, Kern, thar’s sum-then between us; it’s time it war fixed—don’t like such things ter stand long; but they don’t spile much in my keepin’. Agatone run’d agin ther wrong sawyer when he run’d agin Bill Johnson!”

“That he did, Bill.”

“But who’r yer goin’ ter send on the trail, at day-break?”

"Oh, the Tonquoway! you know him."

"He'll do. Let's quile up."

And with the word he spread his buffalo-robe on the floor, and said, as he threw himself upon it—

"Don't like this 'ere sleepin' twixt walls! Too close—can't breathe free! kinder strangulates a man! Don't see how yer can stand it, Kern!"

"Oh, a man can get used to a heap o' things, Bill!"

We were all soon stretched upon our respective pallets, and I was nearly asleep, when Bill, who had been tossing from side to side, sniffing, drawing long breaths, and seeming to be very restless, suddenly jumped to his feet, took up his blanket, and walked out of the door, grumbling and muttering as he went:

"Cussed hole! 'nough to smother a ground-hog! Wouldn't sleep thar fer a hundred beaver pelts!"

I nearly burst my sides with restrained laughter at the idea of a man's fearing he'd be "strangulated" in a log-house, with both doors open, or rather with no door at all. But I fully appreciated Bill's uneasiness after six or eight months' tour on the prairies, and recollect being obliged to do the same thing the first time I slept in a house afterwards. A sense of suffocation came over me as soon as I lay down—though the room was very open; and after trying in vain to sleep for several hours, I was obliged to take my blanket, and go out to sleep under a tree! Nothing less than the fanning of the strong wings of the mountain wind, laden with the perfume of the flowery plains, can lull to sleep these spoiled luxurious children of the wilds.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MANIAC HORSEMAN.

JUST before day we were waked by the arrival of Texas, who made his appearance, accompanied by quite a characteristic retinue. It consisted of the lieutenant, his wife, and Davis. The woman, very drunk, was mounted on horseback, and was with difficulty held in her seat by the husband, who walked on one side and Davis on the other. On the shoulder of this last personage her hand was caressingly rested, while she leaned over his face gabbling and stammering idiotically her maudlin affection.

I had noticed at the fandango a bottle filled with a clear, pale liquor, which I ascertained to be common American whiskey; the movements of which, along with those of the small tin cup accompanying it, had appeared to excite a high degree of interest on the part of the females present. These warm-blooded dames had preferred "whiskey," as the more volatile and fiery drink, to the "Pulque," their national beverage. I observed the men to drink but seldom, while the women kept the cup and bottle constantly active among them. Indeed, it is proverbial to those familiar with the general characteristics of the lower and middle classes of a Mexican population, that the women are more loose and licentious than the men. It is not at all astonishing, therefore, that the race should be so miserably degenerate.

The most hideously revolting object I know of is a drunken woman. Man may brutalize himself very far—may be prepared even to sell his "birth-right;" but so long as God's signature of "angel" signed in the calm purity of woman's brow appeals to him mute and untarnished, he is safe—there is everything to

hope for him. But to think of a nation whose women are most lecherous, most debauched!—need we be surprised at anything in such a people? And a beautiful woman as this was! To see her lolling her tongue—simpering with dripping lips—blinking and leering her open shame upon this tinselled miscreant—with dark large eyes that might have won back a soul even into him, had they been lit with the soft, lustrous flame of innocent joy!

“ Oh, what a mansion have the vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee!”

But sentiment is all thrown away upon this Mexican slut. My cheeks fairly burned, though, to think that the miserable wretch, her husband, was an American, who had drawn the milk of an honest woman, and was yet alive, though so immeasurably sunk—so base a dastard as to play meek second to a scene like this. Yet this fellow could fight Mexicans and Indians, and was called a man on this frontier. Her domination over the brute was so complete, that she compelled him quietly to submit to seeing her lavish upon Davis those caresses he had sacrificed his position among his countrymen to buy. I hoped this singular passiveness might be traced to some cause more honorable to his manhood, at least; for this person had once held a station of dignity in one of the governmental institutions at home, and had received the diploma of one of our oldest colleges. I was fain to hope that, perhaps, accident, growing out of some wild frontier scene, had placed him thus inexplicably in the power of the “Euphuist”—anything, rather than believe such infamy on the part of a countryman voluntary. Crime and license can strangely distort humanity.

This agreeable trio passed on to the Rancho of the lieutenant, which was a half-mile below on the river. The Texan was in a very surly and stupid mood—the consequence of the over-night’s excesses—and we could get but little out of him concerning what occurred at the old dame’s Rancho after our hasty departure. A muttered fragment now and then was all we could get—such as—“ There was the devil to pay when you left!—why didn’t

you kill Agatone?—had as much trouble as if you had—Old hag—like a she wild-cat! Pretty friends you!—left me among five hundred Yellow Bellies.—Had to bleed some—break a few heads—let me alone then,” &c.

I concluded he had a rough time of it among them all, exasperated as they must have been; but his surly coolness seemed to regard the idea of keeping any number of Mexicans at bay with so much stolid indifference, that I forbore to question his incommunicative humor any further. When he heard it had been determined we should start to Bexar at once for Hays, he was furious, and swore at first that he would not go. A mule had been provided for me, and I had mounted to start alone, when he called to me gruffly to wait and he would go with me. He joined me in a few minutes without his gun. My gun was in the house, and I called to the Colonel to bring both his and mine with our holsters, when the fellow snappingly swore that “he would not be troubled with a gun—there was no danger—he warn’t afraid—warn’t a-going to be troubled with lugging a gun between here and Bexar!” I was annoyed by this insinuation—my boyish pride took fire at once; and although I knew this proposition to be the result of the present splenetic mood, yet feeling a little spleened myself, I determined to see him through on his own terms, and merely said, “Very well, sir—as you choose.”

The Colonel, to my astonishment, simply because he was too lazy to go and bring the weapons for us, encouraged this silly resolution by saying, “Yes, go along—there is no danger now—the Comanches have been driven from the country, and you’re less likely to see them now than at any other time.” We turned to go, when Bill Johnson shouted after us, “Boys, I never parts from old Sue myself, no how—ner goin’ nowhar; no tellin’ what’ll turn up—best ter keep yer eye skinned, and be always ready!” I saw the good sense of this warning—it was too late though. The stupid whim of Texas had carried the day, and we must abide the issue; and a sufficiently ridiculous issue it was!

We had scarcely gone half the distance, when we met one of those itinerant Jesuit priests who are to be stumbled upon in the most out-of-the-way places in Mexico—the Far West and North—who gave us the comfortable information, that the whole country

between us and Bexar was filled with Comanches, who were scalping and slaying the Mexicans right and left. This was something of a poser. The benevolent priest, in a very impressive manner, urged us to return to the Colonel's Rancho, and offered us the protection of the valiant cohort of dirty, ragged, half-armed Mexicans who accompanied him as a body-guard.

I saw and felt at once the entire absurdity of attempting to proceed under such circumstances, and was about to accept the offer so courteously conveyed, when Texas, in the insane and silly spirit of braggadocio, characteristic of himself and his country, and for the purpose of throwing the odium of what might be construed into "a back-out" upon me, insinuated pretty roundly that he "did not care for the Comanches—wanted to get on to Bexar—would go back if I was afraid," &c.

This was low spite, the result of a lingering reminiscence of the "breakfast scene," for which I instantly determined to punish him severely; for I knew that these wild, ruffianly fellows who have been accustomed to depend upon their guns for everything, seldom stirring out without them, are always dreadfully panic-stricken when they find themselves in imminent danger and disarmed; so turning my mule abruptly, I merely said, "Come on, sir: I intend to be in Bexar in the shortest possible time." He grew white as a sheet at this unexpected turn, and dashed past me at desperate speed. The old priest, who perceived there was some boyish pique at the bottom of this madness, waved his hand as I looked back, in sad adieu.

Never did two youngsters repent more heartily of a silly whim than we did of this before reaching Bexar. So soon as we had leisure enough to realize the predicament we had placed ourselves in, our imaginations at once assumed the reins; and we had forthwith populated every clump of trees and thicket of underbrush with legions of Indians. I conjured more in one half-hour out of the trunks of innocent trees than I had seen in all my life; and when we suddenly came upon the body of a Mexican they had scalped a short time before, I verily believe my hair would have stood on end had not the feeling of terror which was possessing me been somewhat diverted and alleviated by a glance

at the wild work it was making with the Texan's face. It was absolutely convulsed. Had

“ Harpies and hydras—all the sooty fiends
 'Twixt Africa and Ind”—

been flapping their scaly pinions about his ears, he could not have looked more desperately frightened.

I was greatly comforted and relieved at this sight, and forgot in a great measure my own burden in revelling over the agonies with which he bore his. The case was bad enough, certainly. We, on an open plain, entirely unarmed, when such work as this was going on around us! The predicament was too much for Texas at last; and in a whining voice he proposed that we should turn aside, and stop at some Mexican Ranchos several miles off until night set in. I was sufficiently relieved at having this proposition *come from him*, not to render it necessary for him to repeat it. Off we started at a killing pace, and, as we neared the Ranchos, had the gratification of nearly losing our scalps at the very gate. The Indians were driving in a party of Mexicans before their lances, and but for a rush, such as only desperate men could have made, by which we were enabled to dash in pell-mell with the Mexicans, we should have been shut out, and paid for our rashness with our blood on the very lintels of the door of safety. In addition, we had to run the risk of being shot by the frightened people inside, who, astounded by our sudden appearance, took us for Indians, and were banging at us through windows and port-holes with their rusty fusees on every side, fortunately for us, with their usual bad aim. We could get no arms from them, and were fain to wait till night set in, dark, cold, and stormy, and then creep out and make our way with fluttering hearts, chattering teeth, and otherwise in a most pitiable plight, to Bexar, where we arrived about midnight.

Late as it was, we found the Rangers up and collected in Johnston's bar-room, for a carouse. They received us merrily, and greeted the account of our lugubrious adventurings with shouts of laughter. They had been in pursuit of the Comanches at the summons of the half-frantic Black; and in the effort to intercept had missed the party, concerning which we gave them

first the information in possession of the reader. When they heard the fate of the poor boy, they sobered down instantly, and deep curses and stern mutterings were heard through the room in place of boisterous laughter.

"Poor Black!" said Hays; "his is a hard case; he has been like a madman ever since he joined us; I am afraid this will make him one sure enough. Castro will pay them fellows off in full; he'll receipt 'em." We then told him about the affair at the fandango, and of the arrival of Bill Johnson.

"Hah! Bill is there? He's worth a dozen common men! Agatone will have to look sharp. There's Bill, Black, and the Colonel, all splendid trailers; either would give his right hand for a fair shot at that fellow! Boys, we'll go at day-break! Some of you let Black know. He's at Navarro's."

The thing was settled as coolly as if it had been a fox-chase we were going upon; and we separated to get a few hours' sleep. We were up before daybreak; and in about half an hour the yawning, drowsy members of the party, who came straggling in through the lanes, and meeting us at the corners of the streets, were all collected on the bank of the river, and ready to start. Looking over the party, which consisted of eight Americans, Hays remarked, "Black is not here!"

It was a raw, misty morning, and at the moment we turned to the sound of a horse's feet, and saw a dim figure emerging from one of the lanes of the suburb, and which was approaching us at full speed. "There he is!" and in another instant a rider, muffled in a coarse green blanket, with a wolf-skin cap drawn down over his eyes, dashed through our party, and without speaking a word plunged into the water at the ford. "Poor fellow, he's wild this morning!" said Hays, in a low voice, as we all followed him into the water. In perfect silence the man lashed and urged his horse up the bank, and when we reached the top we could see him going at full speed over the plain, sitting stiffly in the saddle, with his chin fallen upon his breast and his rifle lying balanced across the pommel before him. In a short time he was out of view though we were in a brisk gallop.

In about an hour, at a short turn of the trail, among the thickets, we came close upon him, sitting in the same rigid

position, while his horse crept along at a snail's pace. As we clattered by him, he roused himself an instant, urged his horse into the same headlong speed, and before he again passed out of sight his figure seemed once more frozen in the seat. No word had passed. There was something inexpressibly mournful, and, to me, exciting in this strange ride. That stricken, fitful man seemed madly flying before us, as if we personated to him the shades of his murdered family, chasing him with wails for vengeance ; shades that he felt could not be laid ever again, but with *blood* ! The whole party were chilled and saddened by it, and as no time was lost in conversation, we were at the Rancho before I realized that half the distance had been gone over.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAILIN' PARTY.

THEY were all ready and met us ; the Colonel, with the grin of "a belly-pinched wolf," who had caught the scent of slaughter on the air, and Bill with a smothered chuckling, "He ! he ! Glad yer came, boys ! Kern's blooded him !"

"Who ; Agatone ?"

"Yes ! Tonque's found whar he laid down jest er little er the lye-stuff about !"

"We'll get him, Bill, won't we ?"

"Can't tell, Captain Jack—cussed sly varmint, that Agatone ! He's tuck to water, and the Tonque lost him !"

"Oh, we'll bring him out of that, Bill ! Come, boys—all ready ?"

"All ready !"

I saw Black sitting on a log by his horse, his head bowed on his knees, his rifle across his lap. When he heard this, he sprang to his feet, and at one bound was in the saddle and away.

We were off at a canter ; the Tonquoway and Bill leading after Black, who kept on far ahead ; the Indian on horseback, and Bill, who scorned a horse, swinging those massive limbs of his along with marvellous ease in huge, rapid strides. It was a most picturesque scene, that party, mounted on horses of all sizes and colors ; the Colonel had by this time obtained a very good one for me ; our costume a singular blending of civilized backwoods and Mexican taste ; our arms gleaming in the sunshine and our steeds curvetting and plunging over the wave-like undulations of the ocean meadows.

We had progressed in this way over a lovely region for about two hours, when, just as we were getting among the hills, and the scenery becoming wilder, we unexpectedly found ourselves drawn up on a bluff bank of the San Antonio river. Here the trail was lost. When we descended to the water's edge, there were evidences on this side of a camp, and the tracks led from it to the water ; but there were no traces on the other side of their coming out. This puzzled all parties the more, as the banks of the river were bluff and very high on both sides for a number of miles above and below, and the gorge just at this point was the only place where it could be crossed. Bill said the "varmint" must have been turned to an otter, and that there was some sly hole in the bluffs he had swum to and hid in. We crossed and scattered up and down on both sides of the river, to look for the trail ; but after an hour's search we all met again, and concluded we were nonplussed in that quarter, at least. This gorge opened into a deep winding valley, flanked on either hand by knolls, forming an irregular ridge covered with live oak. Bill thought that, "unless Old Harry had flew'd away with him, he must leave a sign across this here ditch!"—which, by the by, was from a half-mile to a mile in width ; so the orders were to stretch our line from foot to foot of the ridges and breast it up the valley.

The spies went on ahead, while we breasted up the valley—Black, in his moody, headlong, silent way, accompanying them. The only incident for several hours was the pulling down of a fine buck, in full view of us, by two large wolves. They had been running the gallant animal, I suppose, for many hours, and when he broke suddenly into the valley they were but a few paces behind, and so intent as not to notice us. Their tongues were all out, and they ran very slow. We stopped. One of the wolves seized his haunch : he wheeled and plunged heavily at them with his fore-feet and antlers. They avoided his charge, and one of them rushed at his throat ; in an instant he was down and killed. The men were very anxious to shoot, and the Colonel and Hays tried to prevent them ; but bang ! bang ! went two guns, and the wolves tumbled over.

We were getting tired, and had despaired of finding the

Mexicans, and discipline, never at any time much regarded, was at an end. We were riding very slowly, waiting for the spies, who were still on ahead, when I, utterly worried out by the fatiguing slowness of our progress, galloped off in advance; and seeing, some distance further, a very remarkable-looking knoll, covered with cedars; which rose abruptly from the centre of the valley, I made for it alone, with the intention of enjoying the view from the top and joining the party as they passed. My horse climbed the steep sides with difficulty, and when I reached the top, a more paradisaical view never burst upon the eye of mortal than this which rewarded my trouble and risk. As I stood gazing enraptured over it, my eye was attracted by some object moving on the comb of the opposite ridge, just where it was defined clearly against the sky. I felt my heart jump, and on looking steadily I could clearly distinguish the outline of a horseman wearing the Mexican sombrero, who seemed to be endeavoring to screen himself behind a tree from objects below that he was trying to get a good look at.

There was something even in the distant outline that reminded me of the cloaked figures at the fandango. I understood the whole thing in an instant. The Mexicans had outwitted us, and our whole course had been watched by their spies, of whom this was one. The cedars concealed me, and my resolve was taken in an instant. I descended on the side opposite, and happily met our party just rounding the hill on that side. My news was told and the action instantaneous. We were out of sight of him now, and he would wait our coming out on the other side of the hill.

Hays, who now waked up and showed what he was, with the Bravo and myself, plunged under cover of the bush at the foot of the ridge, where the dry bed of a stream ran, and rode back with the intention of crossing the valley when we were high enough up to be out of his view; and then mounting the ridge he was on, to come up on the other side, while the rest of the party rode slowly and carelessly ahead as they had been doing before. He thought that if we got the spy hemmed in and frightened, he would dash right for his camp and lead us in.

The manœuvre was admirably carried out. The fellow suspected nothing, but cautiously crept after the advancing party,

who laughed, and talked, and sang with the best possible affectation of unconsciousness. His chuckling consciousness of successful cunning was most unpleasantly broken in upon when we shouted, which was to be the signal to the other party, and he saw himself inclosed on both sides and no chance to run for it, but the top of the ridge, which kept him in full view of each. He broke off, though, at his speed, the two parties keeping parallel with him. The object was not to catch him at once; but after testing our speed sufficiently to see that we could close with him when we pleased, we held up, and let him think he had some chance of escape; believing he would make for camp if we gave him play.

Hays was right, as usual; and in a little after we had fallen back, he left the ridge suddenly and made across the plain, on the side we were, towards a blue and hazy line of timber.

"There's the camp, in them woods!" said Hays, joyfully. "Go to the top of the ridge and beckon to the boys, Kentuck!"

I complied. They were just hesitating what to do, when, seeing my gestures, with a shout they took the hill. Now we had it. The fellow had got a half-mile the start, and it wouldn't do to let him get in before us and give the alarm.

"We must close up and go in on his heels!"

A single figure was perceived galloping down from the ridge after us, with tremendous speed. He soon joined us: it was Black. The raven had scented the slaughter from afar! He was coming to meet us, and had turned the spy from the ridge.

Our horses were strained to the top of their mettle. There was no more shouting; every faculty was wrought into the intensity of the exciting chase. We were all in a body now, and our pace began to tell in lessening the half-mile; the woods we were making for began to grow more distinct, and by the time the trunks stood out separately, we were within a hundred yards of him. Now the lash flew, and every nerve was strained.

"Look there," said the Colonel, pointing to a flock of buzzards, perched upon a tree; "that shows their camp! We've got 'em at last!"

And with a savage oath he jerked his hat from his head, put it under his seat, and looked at his gun. With a stunning whoop

—for we now saw their horses, which had been turned loose to graze—Black, who was ahead, fired at the poor spy, for we had got all out of him we wanted; and trampling over his writhing body, we swept like a thunder-gust through a line of bushes into an open space surrounded by thickets. There were about fifty men springing from the ground, where they had been lying, and in every attitude and expression of fright, surprise, and consternation—some stopping to fire at us, others running on their hands and feet, rolling and plunging into the bushes.

I remember seeing Black throw himself over his horse's head among them first, and like a frantic wild beast strike right and left with his long rifle-barrel, crushing in a skull at every blow, and then disappear raging through the bushes in pursuit of three or four huddled and scrambling wretches.

It was, throughout, a terrible and rapid scene: the ring of rifles and roar of the Mexican musket—the dismounting—the clubbed guns—the fight hand-to-hand—the scream for mercy, smothered in the death-groan—the crashing through the brush—the pursuit—every man for himself with his enemy in view—the scattering on every side—the sounds of battle dying away into a pistol-shot here and there through the wood, and a shriek—the collecting again, and the shouts of laughter as one man after another would come panting into the clear place with the trophies of his slain, or without them, as it happened.

Black came tumbling out, covered with gore and sweat—his eyes glaring wildly—his dripping knife in one hand—his rifle-barrel, bent and smeared with brains and hair, in the other—his pistols still in his belt, untouched. He threw himself sullenly upon the grass, his head resting on the body of a dead Mexican—jerked the wolf-skin cap down over his swarthy brow, and in an instant was as still and silent as the corpse. Nobody spoke to him, and the reckless, unseasonable mirth was for an instant checked, as we all turned silently and looked at him.

The Colonel was the last to come back, and came with bloody hands, foaming and stamping with rage, for Agatone had not been found, and had probably escaped!

CHAPTER XIV.

BILL JOHNSON "STUMPED."

WE lost sight, in the headstrong action of the incidents last described, of our long-sided friend, Bill Johnson. So soon as all were assembled, we missed him, and some one shouted—

"Where's Bill, the old coon, gone to? He wan't born to be killed by a Mexican, sure!"

"Ah!" said the Colonel, "don't fash your brains about Bill. He's up to a thing or two. Warrant you he's nosing the right trail. He came out after Agatone!"

At the name of Agatone, Black sprang half erect, and shouted hoarsely—

"Leave me! leave me! I tore out all their hearts, but could not find his!" then, muttering inaudibly to himself, fell back. All paused a moment.

"Didn't he go out with the spies?" asked the Bravo, in a low voice.

"No!" said Hays. "He never left the river, but struck off through the woods, up the bank. He went for another look. Bill didn't feel easy 'bout our losing that trail yesterday. It *was* strange, boys, wan't it? These were his fellows, but Agatone wan't here. Bill will tell the tale about him."

"Yes," muttered the Colonel; "if he'd have been under a leaf here, I'd have found him. I killed two of the rascals that looked like him, anyhow!"

"Colonel, you mean to make a coffee-cup of his skull, don't you?" said the Bravo, laughing.

"Hell! no; I'll save it to put a ball through once a week, to keep my hand in."

"It will beat the skull Hamlet talked to, in 'eyelet-holes,' all hollow, then!" laughed Fitzgerald.

Here one of the men sprang forward, with an exclamation of pain, rubbing the calf of his leg, from which the blood was streaming. We had all been grouped near the body of a Mexican, who seemed to be dead. His hand clutched a bloody knife—the last spasm was on him, and the death-rattle in his throat, when we turned; he had made one dying blow for vengeance.

"That d—d yaller-belly is playing possum," said the Colonel. "Kill him!"

"He won't play possum any more," said the Bravo, quietly drawing a bead on him with his pistol, which he fired, and blew out the smoke as coolly as if he had been practising at a mark.

The Colonel turned him over with his foot. The man was dead before the shot.

"There, Bravo! you've lost a load! Jim," said he to the wounded man, "split his shirt off, to tie up that scratch with."

So these hard men talked, and joked, and laughed, as if death were a bridegroom, and his seeming in the body of a Mexican a merry masking!

We found, on comparing notes, that thirteen Mexicans had been killed, but no prisoners taken; for it was war to the knife with these robbers. The dense thicket around their camp had favored the escape of the rest. We collected together their horses, and the plunder they had left behind. The escopets the men broke and threw away; the saddles, and indeed all the horse equipments, were very handsome, and the party valued them exceedingly. All the frontier Americans prefer Mexican horse-furniture to their own. It is the most complete and admirable I have ever met with, and is the only point in which the Mexicans excel, except in the use of the short knife and the lasso. These things, and the horses, were distributed by lot, after having been divided into as many equal shares as there were men, reserving one a-piece for Bill and the spies. When Black was called upon to choose, he merely shook his head and groaned. Each man had stripped the person of his enemy as he fell of whatever was valuable to him, and then left him for the buzzards and wolves. Several of the men had been slightly wounded, but hats and

horses suffered more than our bodies ; for the Mexicans, as usual, shot everywhere else but in the right place. Amid a great deal of loud talking and merriment, at the expense of the marksmanship of the poor wretches, the ghastly ceremonial of " casting lots for the garments of the slain " was got through with at last ; and with the price of blood gathered together in transportable order, we started on our return, and could hear the sharp snarling and see the battles of the wolves over the dead before we were two hundred yards off. I do not wonder that superstition has chosen these vile animals as the favorite agents of her most horrible legends. There is a sneaking malignity about the tawny front,

" Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,"

mingled with a fell sagacity leading them with almost infallible certainty in the wake of slaughter, which is very well calculated to awake strange associations in those who observe them on their native wilds.

It was impossible for me to get rid of the idea that they must have been glaring out upon us, with their green and charnel eyes, from the dark thickets, as we rode past that morning, and read with wizard shrewdness in our flashing arms and on our brows, through all the mockery of merriment, that human passions were forth upon the chase of death, and that they grinned their white tusks and lapped their thirsty jaws in fierce exulting over the feast of blood to come, and slunk, and watched, and crawled upon our trail, and sent the jolly tidings round to all their hungry brothers, that they might be in at the revel ! How they must love the man of blood ! Sure it was in recompense for this they came that night in bands around our camp, to lull our dreams with pleasant roundelays, and wailed such horrid choruses as

" Blue meagre hag, nor stubborn ghost,
Nor goblin, nor swart fairy of the mine,"

heard ever yet resound, that they might foot it by, beneath the " visiting moon," or the black, dripping arches of deep caverns !

Black had long since left us, galloping off by himself. We had ridden several hours on our return, and were beginning to

near the gorge where we had crossed the river, when Hays, pointing suddenly towards the sky, said—

“Look, boys! there is news!”

I looked, and could see nothing but a thin column of smoke that shot up to mingle with the clouds.

“How is that news?” I asked.

“Ha, ha! Kentuck,” said Fitz, “you’re a poor benighted being. As yet, you ‘see through a glass darkly,’ and a green one at that. Don’t you know that is what the old saying, ‘I smoke you,’ for ‘I understand,’ ‘I’ve found you out,’ comes from? That’s a telegraph, sir! sent up, I suppose, by Bill, to let the Colonel know that he has caught his ‘otter!’”

“But how can you know it is Bill?”

“Oh,” says Hays, “we’ve seen Bill’s smoke too often not to know it as well as we know his long tracks, or his whoop.”

“Yes,” said Fitz, “Bill’s a great artist at getting up smoke. He’ll smoke you the Mexicans or Comanches—good news or bad news—by throwing on an armful of green moss to make a very black column when the ‘Old Harry’ himself is to pay in person, or simply a handful when it’s only one of his young ones out, or dry sticks when he would merely say, ‘Here I am!’ It’s well to keep your ‘gaze turned heavenward’ when Bill is scouting for Comanches; for when he discovers them he sends up a dark puff that lasts about ten seconds, and looks like a whiff from the sulphur-pipe of ‘the gentleman in black.’ He says it don’t do to favor the Comanches by smoking long, for the’r glimpsers is tarnal keen!”

We soon rounded an angle of the valley, which brought us in sight of the river from the top of its shelving bank. About half-way down to the water, on a projecting rock, the gaunt, leather-clad figure of Bill was stretched. He was leaning on his elbow, with his gun between his legs, and slowly dropping dry sticks into a small fire that burned before him. He was on his feet in an instant as the sound of our horses’ feet reached his ears. We galloped down the hill, with cheerings and shouts, and were soon dismounted around the old fellow—everybody talking, and nobody listening. Perfectly unmoved, Bill looked round upon us all with a stare of something like astonishment, that anything

could possibly happen in the world worth talking so fast about ; for the party, anticipating fun from his disclosures and manner of making them, had thrown off the impassiveness common to such men, for a mischievous motive.

"Pish, boys !" said he at last ; "ye'r jest like a litter er otter pups slid'n down a bank, ter ker-slowsh in the water ! I'm 'shamed er ye. If I'd er killed Old Wooden-leg I wouldn't er made all this kerousin' tu it !"

"Well, but, Bill," laughed Fitz, "what's become of the 'otter' yer went after ? We've got our pelts—where's yours, old wolf-dog ? You've no right to show your teeth !"

"Yes, where's the fur, Bill ? where's the ~~fur~~ ?" was shouted around him.

"I reck'n this ere'll count fur," said he, slowly drawing from his bosom a gold cross-hilted Spanish stiletto. "I don't stink up my fingers a skinning such varmints ! Here's the brush ter show !"

"Colonel !" shouted the Bravo, "he's got him ! Now for your coffee-cup !"

"Now for the eyelet-holes !" said Fitz.

"Blazes and hell ! you haven't killed him, Bill ?" growled the Colonel, in an angry, disappointed voice.

"What's the matter now, Colonel ?" shouted every one, in astonishment.

"I wanted to do that myself," said he, sulkily.

"Nateral enough," said Bill. "But I can't say, Kern, as I should er tied him to bring him in to ye ! I'd a kinder hankerin' that way myself !"

"What ! didn't you get him at last ?" exclaimed several at once. "Whose fine frog-sticker is that ?"

"Now, boys," said Bill, coolly taking his seat on the rock, "if yer'll jest make yerselves easy, and don't bother me with talking', I'll tell yer all about it—the tarnalest strangest thing as ever com'd in my knowin' !"

There was a general settling down on all sides at this.

"Out with it, old slow-track ! You nosed up Agatone, did you, and he got away ?" said Fitz, mischievously.

"Thar ye go, yer Irish spread-mouth," said Bill. "Shut up your bone-trap, will ye?"

"Well," he continued, "I took on considerable 'bout losing that ere trail last night. Thinks I—Bill Johnson oughtn't ter be flung out by such a little dried monkey. So I takes old Sue, and sneaks off up the river, for I seed them tracks in the water was goin' up stream. Thinks I, up one side and down the other, fur enough, and I'll find his mark. So I went on up 'bout five milés, till I passed all yer tracks whar ye made galloping up and down; then I look'd out spry. Thinks I, honey, but ye had a splatheration uv it, as Fitz, thar, says——"

"Don't slander my English, Bill. Go on."

"Er wadin' all this way up that cussed river, where a decent horse can't cross, 'cept 'casionally. 'Bout a half-mile further on, I seen some drift-wood tolerable near cross the river. Thinks I, now yer begin to make figures whar I can count. Sure enough, two horse-tracks were comin' out o' the water! I foller'd 'em awhile, till they stops and tramps 'round considerable; then one takes square off ter th' right—t'other keeps up the bank. I follers the one out, till I comes to a loose horse, hurt mightily behind with a big ball, Kern, like six-shooter!"

The Colonel nodded, and Bill went on:

"I goes back to the bank, and tuck th' single track. 'Twas on this side. I follers it 'bout a mile, when, what do ye think, boys! a trail comes in, straight from the Ranchos; and they stops there together considerable, for both their horses dinged, and it war both the same age; and there war a man's track on the ground. Thinks I, swappin' double. That's Agatone! It's a little track—got one of six-shooter's pills in him—can't ride alone! But who th' darnation war that feller who struck in?"

"Colonel," said Hays quietly, "wasn't Davis about when we left your Rancho?"

"Yes. I wanted to kill him the day he come, but the boys wouldn't let me!"

Nothing more was said, but a cold scowl settled upon the faces of the men, and they gripped their rifles hard, till their knuckles grew white; while Bill went on with his story:

"They kept on, 'longside. I followed till the trail war come to Big-Bend bottom. I was sneakin' 'long through the timber, when I heard men talk—couldn't see 'em for the bushes; and there war 'twixt me and them a cussed swamp bayou with an old log 'cross it. Thinks I, now for it! Bill Johnson's here, and old Sue! So I takes the old log. It did look kinder 'spicious, but there wa'n't no other way. Cudjump, I went, into the black mud and green water; the cantankerous log snarled right in two. The fellers hearn it, and broke. I seen a glimpse of 'em—there war three—one ridin' behind. You know, boys, I'm somethin' on my pegs. So I shook the stink off, and twod-dled through them brush, a little particular. I don't mind horses in runnin'. In 'bout a mile I glimpsed 'em ag'in. I seen whar they were makin,' and headed 'em. *Thar war but two*—goin' like streaks through the trees. Old Sue winked at th' hinder one, and he jumped astonishin', clean up out o' the saddle! T'other one had somethin' red on his cloak, and maybe he didn't skoot! The feller had done kickin', as usual for old Sue, when I got to him, and couldn't tell no tales. But he wa'n't Agatone! nor the other wa'n't—for he war taller. Whar on earth the little weasel-face could a' got to, is more nor I can tell!"

This created considerable stir in the party, who drew long breaths, and shifted their positions; while Fitz interrupted him maliciously with—

"What, Bill! haven't you got the green out of your eye yet? Why, they pushed him up a tree, to be sure!"

"Thar ye ar' ag'in, ye waw-mouthed bog-trotter! May ye be chased to death with a snake-skin to yer tail! Don't ye know Bill Johnson thunk o' all that? I tuck this thingamy out o' his bosom, and went back on the trail to where I took across. Thar wa'n't no sign whar they had stopped close to a tree to shove him up, nor no tracks whar he'd tuck the ground! Bill Johnson looked, and thar war no mistake! Tarnation take me if I can see any way he'd got off, 'less he flew! That old devil's squaw, Cavillo, rid him off on her broomstick—that's how it war!"

Bill said this with such solemn earnestness, that Fitz and myself burst into a loud laugh.

"Shet yer purtater-trap, will ye? Kentuck, I thought ye war better mannered! It's no laughin' matter, boys. I tell ye, Bill Johnson believes it. She looks kinder stewed, anyhow, as if all the juice war dried up, drinkin' hot sulphur; and she's got evil fire in her eyes, that's red like old Sue's mouth when she speaks. Ain't it so, Kern?"

"Yes; and I'll ease her down to old Split-hoof's hug, some of these days, so that she'll stay there! Bill, this is a deuce of a strange tale! What do you think of it, Hays?"

"I think so, too! If it had been anybody else but Bill trailing, I should have thought, with Fitz, that they had just stuck Agatone up in a tree, among the moss, and galloped on. But Bill looked, and if Bill is stumped, none of us could have done anything. The little rascal's smart, sure! He's thrown out the best trailer ever I saw twice in twenty-four hours—wounded, at that! But, Colonel, that red on the cloak proves it was Davis that helped them. Bad business!"

"There now, Kentuck," said the Colonel to me, "if you hadn't been so handy with your *humanity*, it would have saved us the trouble of killing that cur now."

"But would have spoiled my fun," said the Bravo. "I've a curiosity to see if I can't split a bullet on his sharp nose!"

"That's a new mark of yours, Bravo," said Fitz. "It's snuffing the snuffers instead of the candle!"

A general guffaw followed this sally of Fitz, and we all rose to start. The spies and Black now came galloping down the hill, and Castro with them, and a moment after the Lipans were around us. Castro was nearly out of his wits with delight at seeing Hays and the Colonel. I was delighted, too, at the dignified modesty with which Hays received his extravagant caresses. There was something fresh and touching to me in the unsophisticated joy of this child of nature at meeting these men, to whom he considered himself indebted for all his warrior-training and reputation with his tribe. Hays, especially, he seemed to look up to as a higher order of being, and with almost

Oriental deference in his fondness. He wore two scalps at his belt, and there were several others among his warriors, as well as a number of wounded. Their persons, arms, and horses, all showed that in the "four times sun go," which he said must elapse before we saw him again, he had been at rough work. The faithful fellow had been true to his promise about our horses, and, with an exulting look at the Colonel and myself, he ordered one of his braves to lead them to us.

I was right glad to get Sorrel again ; for passing strong is the love one learns to bear the noble steed who has been the patient, honest friend, the companion—

" His corporeal motion governed by my spirit"—

through many a weary day of solitary peril. There is an intuition of human thoughts and emotions about these animals, that is most striking—a prompt sympathy in the finer specimens of them almost marvellous. Stormy passions in the rider dash an electric inspiration through their big veins, and swell the pulsing arteries to turgid throbbing—light with fires as angry as their large eyes, and all convulse the quivering muscles—till they will laugh with neighings in the hurricane of battle, and shake, like beasts with fangs, fragments dripping from their bloody jaws—for that red wine makes them drunk, too, and mad ; and then, if you be merry, how with pricked ear and airy capricoling his light movement chimes your humor ; and when you are sad and thoughtful, how sober, steadfast, and demure he stalks, with measured tread, and drooping crest, and contemplative eye, guarded, as though he feared to break the subtil thread you spun to weave in woof of midnight, or of beams. Glorious animals, I love them ! and have seen in them traits of courteous chivalry far beyond the soul-girth or the ken of those who are their tyrants. Sorrel recognised me. He was evidently something the worse of the wild companionship and usage of the few days past. Horses never forget a considerate friend, which is more than can be said of the animal which claims to be the nobler. I thought the joy the Colonel exhibited on recovering his old favorite horse, quite a redeeming trait in his character.

It was promptly proposed by Hays to make this new and unexpected addition to our forces available in ferreting out the mystery of Agatone's escape, and fixing, if possible, the proofs of his treachery upon the miscreant Davis. Bill was to take them to the trail, and it was hoped that their numbers and singular sagacity might be able to accomplish what even his unerring skill had failed to do. Black was to accompany them.

During all the foregoing scene, I had observed him sitting on his horse, apart—his bent and broken rifle resting across the saddle before—his hand, stiff with dry gore, clutching it convulsively—his chin resting upon his breast—while now and then his flaming, blood-shotten eyes would throw out a light from under his thick brows, as he glanced suddenly at the scalp hanging at Castro's belt, to be withdrawn as quickly—while his hairy lips would quiver with low mutterings. Castro, after giving us, in picturesque language and actions, a short sketch of his fight with the Comanches, which, it seems, had been a sharp one, set off, under the lead of Bill, with all his warriors, up the river, while we started on the direct route for the Colonel's rancho.

A sharp ride brought us in sight of it. A horse was standing hitched to the picket; and as we rode up to dismount, who should make their appearance in the door but Antone and Davis! the finery of the latter somewhat bespattered to be sure, but he looking as impertinent and self-satisfied as ever. Hearing some one exclaim behind me, "Jack, I will, by Heaven; let me go!" I looked around, and saw Hays struggling with the Bravo, who, with a pistol in his hand, was evidently about to try the curious experiment of bullet-splitting he had spoken of, forthwith, upon the nose of the unconscious-looking Davis. Hays was using all his strength to prevent this—endeavoring to induce him to put off his experiment until Castro and Bill got in, as they would make the matter sure, and then he could do as he pleased. After considerable difficulty, he succeeded in getting him, reluctantly, to put up his pistol, and forego, for a short time, the gratification of his curiosity.

Several of the men now approached the fellow, who seemed not to have understood all this, and continued simpering and chatting, in a very inquisitive mood, with regard to the success of the expedition, to them as they advanced; but when one of them roughly

seized him by the collar, and jerked him from the door nearly upon his face, his mood was suddenly changed, and with all the traitorous malignity of his nature, mingled with the startle of desperate fright in his expression, he fought and struggled with a vigorous rapidity that had almost won his release, when four or five more of our party threw themselves upon him, and tied him with a lariat. He now howled, and screamed, and gnashed his teeth, till foam fell from his lips, and tossed his body to and fro with the wildest demonstrations of frantic fear and fury; but it was of no avail. These men sat by and smiled; and when he threw his eyes around, after exhausting himself in his fruitless efforts, with an imploring look, and read in those pitiless eyes the certainty of his doom, he threw himself upon the ground, with a shriek so keen, so shrill with utter despair, that it pierced to my very marrow, and made me shudder, for months afterwards, when I thought of it.

Master Antone had most unaccountably disappeared. The men, meantime, were sitting around in groups, quietly chatting and casting their eyes occasionally in the direction from which Bill and the Indians were expected. It was but a short time till Castro made his appearance on the hill. He was leaning over his horse's neck, looking closely at the ground. The position in following a trail carefully was familiar to all, and every man sprang to his feet, and watched in breathless silence the result; for they all knew that Indians could track a particular horse among fifty others. Castro did not look up for a moment; and I never saw such eager, fixed excitement upon the faces of men before, as marked those of this group, while the Indian slowly but directly approached us. When within five paces, he raised his head, and fixing his eye upon the horse that had been standing there before, and since we arrived, pointed his finger at him, and said, "That him!" This was Davis's horse.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH OF THE TRAITOR.

THERE was no member of the party who did not of course understand at once, that Bill had led Castro and his Indians back to the place where he had shot Agatone's lieutenant, and lost sight of the man with the "red on his cloak," and that Castro had taken his trail, and followed with unerring skill to the very spot where the horse was hitched. The Indian's expressive gesture and exclamation, "That him!" had settled the matter with regard to Davis—and no further questions would have been asked, but that every one was eager to hear whether any discovery had been made concerning Agatone. Leaving Davis tied and stretched upon the ground, on the inside of the picketing, the whole party climbed the blocks, and eagerly crowded around Castro, to hear his narrative.

There was a degree of mystery about the escape of the Bandit Captain which intensely excited the curiosity of these men—Davis was securely enough hampered, and they felt no apprehensions with regard to him—for Antone was gone, and there was nobody in the house or yard. The Lipan warriors came galloping up, one after another, each like a faithful sleuth-hound closely following the trail. Amidst all the clamors of questions, shouts, and oaths, with which his ears were assailed by the impatient Rangers, Castro continued perfectly impassive. He sat quietly in his saddle watching the arrival of his warriors. Each one, as he came in, would gallop up to the chief, and, with low, quick utterance and rapid gestures, seemed to be making his report—what it was none of us but Hays could understand. Perceiving

that the stoical chieftain was not to be hurried, and that nothing conclusive could be got out of him until his Braves had all arrived, the Rangers became silent too, and following the eye of Castro, would watch each warrior as he appeared on the distant ridge, until he galloped up into the circle, made his report, and fell back among the crowd. The reason for this proceeding was, that Castro had scattered his warriors singly, for miles, around the place where Agatone had disappeared, with orders to find his trail, and then report to him. The men were beginning to mutter and stamp with impatience when the last warrior appeared. When he fell back Hays said, looking at the chief—"Nothing done, Castro?" He bowed his head with an abashed, humbled look, and shaking it slowly, muttered, "No! no find! Him much medicine man! Him conjur!"

"D—n the Indians! Where's Bill Johnson!" shouted the Bravo.

"Yes, where's Bill? Where's Bill? he's worth 'em all!" said several at once.

Hays, who had been speaking in a low voice to Castro, now turned and said, "Bill is out there yet. He says we must surround Cavillo's Rancho—put some one to watch every trail leading into it—we'll catch him that way, my fellows! He'll be sneaking in to-night!"

"Davis can tell," said some one, in a loud voice.

"Yes, he knows all about it," said Fitz—"lets quirt him until he tells."

"Yes, ! yes!" said several; "that's got to be done, Captain. We'll finish with him first!" and all together they rushed towards the stiles to get at Davis, who lay in the yard.

"Don't spoil the edge of his nose, boys!" shouted the Bravo, laughingly. The high picket-fence had been between us and where Davis lay. I was following the crowd—a cold shudder creeping over me, as I thought of the horrid scene which must ensue; for I knew he was to die, and that with fearful tortures—when a confused roar of voices suddenly arose from those before, and a general headlong scramble followed—then came the shrill shriek of a woman's voice, and as I climbed the blocks of the picketing, I could hear, above the confused trampling and cla-

mors, such exclamations as "Kill her!" "Pitch her into the river!" "She let him go!" "The Mexican slut!" "In with her!" "No, no! she's a woman!" &c.

I reached the top—Davis had disappeared. One of the men was dragging a woman from her hiding-place in the low thicket we have before mentioned as being in the back-yard of the Rancho, near the river bank; the rest of the party, with cries and oaths, were running to the man's assistance, and with furious imprecations laid hold of the woman, and in spite of her screams, were dragging her towards the water, when a man whom I recognised as the Lieutenant, sprang in among them to her rescue. In another instant the butt of a gun, laid, not lightly, across his forehead, felled him like an ox. Some one shouted "There he is!" and two guns were fired as a figure dodged quickly behind a tree, on the top of the bluff bank on the other side of the river, and disappeared.

In the momentary pause Hays threw himself among the infuriated crowd around the woman, and dragged her back as they were in the act of plunging her into the water with her hands tied. There was a fierce struggle. I had reached them by this time; and taking up the shout of Hays, "Shame! shame! she is a woman!"—"You are *men*, no murder!"—was striking, pushing, and tugging at his side, before I had time to think what it all meant. She was a woman, and they were going to drown her, was as much as I knew, or wished to know. Fitz and the Bravo came to our help. They let go the woman as the Bravo shouted, "They missed Davis! He's in the woods! Come, he'll get away!" and jumping into the water held his gun up with one hand, and struck with the other for the bluff. Several followed him, as all would have done, had not Hays—leaving the woman in my charge—set off down the river bank, calling to them to come with him to where the bank was less steep.

In the breathless hurry of the preceding incidents I had only time to see and act, but now, having drawn my breath, I perceived in a moment what had occurred—for having been less excited than the rest, I had been behind and somewhat in the dark. The woman, who was shivering in an ague-fit of terror, I saw, was the Mexican wife of the Lieutenant. Antone had probably in-

formed her what was going on. Prompted by her guilty passion, she had crept up by the back way into the yard of the Rancho, and while we were engaged with Castro had cut the thongs from the limbs of Davis, who ran and had jumped into the river. The two guns were fired at him as he disappeared in the woods on the other side. The foremost men had seen her stoop in the brush, and perceiving at once that she had assisted Davis's escape, would have drowned her in their fury. Her husband who was held in great contempt, they had knocked down without ceremony when he attempted to rescue her.

Feeling no particular sympathy for either of them, I merely cut loose her hands, told her to see to her husband, and then followed after Hays. I perceived at once that his had been the proper course, for the Bravo and his men were still struggling to climb the slippery steep bank when I lost sight of them. When I caught up with Hays, I found him and his men mounted behind Castro and his warriors, who had galloped around the picketing to the river. I mounted behind a greasy, half naked fellow, and they pushed their horses into the stream. After a deal of scrambling and splattering we reached the other bank, and stood upon the firm sod. Hays sprang to the ground, and called to us to dismount. It was arranged that Castro's warriors should gallop on in a body to cut off the fugitive's retreat to the Senora Cavillo's Rancho; while we in couples pushed our way into the thick woods. We supposed that the object of both Davis and Agatone would be to get to Cavillo's Rancho—once behind the strong gates of which they might well laugh us to scorn.

The Indians on horseback would overtake Davis if he made directly for the Rancho; if not, they were to spread out their line, and watch while we beat the bush. In this way we supposed we should hardly fail to recapture him, as he had but little start. Castro himself sent his warriors on, while he dismounted, and along with Hays went to where the fellow had been last seen, to take his track and follow it up; but as this would be slow work we went ahead, trusting to chance. Fitz and myself happened to be coupled in the pursuit. For a time, as we penetrated the dense underbrush, the different parties kept in view or at least in hearing of each other. Of course we pushed on as rapidly as the

nature of the ground traversed would permit, and it was not long before all other sounds than those of our own scrambles through the vines and brush died away, and we were alone in the silence of the deep woods. I felt little interest in the chase these men were driving so eagerly. It made small difference to me whether the Mongrel escaped or not. I did not wish to find him, indeed, for I should probably be compelled to shoot him in cold blood—a feat I had no stomach for. But there was *that* in this primitive Nature, wearing her century-calms upon her front, which could not fail to overcome me with a spell—to sink a nameless awe into my being—brooding in shadowy peace upon the tumultuous startle of excitement the passions had been subjected to during the late incidents.

My heedless pace had gradually slackened—for the mood of dreams was on me—and I sat down upon the trunk of a fallen tree. The unpleasant realities of the wild unnatural life I was leading had disappeared, and in delicious revelations the ideal life of calm and holy peace came around me, and in the flushed quiet of *that* lull, the beguiled Fancy danced with its own airy creatures to the merry click of the castanet a bright eyed Woodchuck was sounding, as it sat familiarly on the other end of the log. Texas, battle, blood, Mexicans, Indians, Davis, all were as things that had been and were not, while my heart made music of its blissful memories amidst these evening choristers.

Suddenly my blood rushed to the centres in a cold and shuddering revulsion, and I sprang to my feet as if a rifle-ball had struck me. Could it be real? The shrill yell of a human voice had suddenly burst upon the stillness, and been as suddenly smothered. There was a mortal agony in its tones! I looked around. Fitz had disappeared—there was no one in sight. I perceived for the first time that I was not far from the river bank. Again I heard that voice of death-like anguish—stifled into a low plaining—then bursting out again into louder and wilder shrieks of despairing terror. I had been entirely unmanned by the suddenness of the thing; but now the thought of some foul murder being done in the dark woods nerved me in an instant, and I bounded off in the direction of the sounds. I thought of Fitz—but I had heard no gun—it could not be. Now it was a grating burst of harsh

unnatural laughter, with the sound of struggling feet, that guided me as I ran—then all was silence. I burst my way through a chaparral thicket, and came out upon the old bank of the river—and, my God! may my eyes never rest upon such another scene!

A little below the level on which I was standing, the body of a man (whom I immediately recognised from the clothes to be Davis) writhing in the agonies of death, was suspended by the neck from the limb of a tree which leaned very far over the last bank of the river. It was moving slowly up, rising towards the limb, while the rope grated harshly over the bark, and as I stepped forward I saw beneath the hairy and haggard face of Black, lit with the wild glare of maniac ferocity. With set uncovered teeth and swollen muscles, he was leaning back, tugging with the furious energy of madness at the other end of the rope by which he was slowly hoisting his victim. My blood felt as if it were freezing with horror. My first impulse was to leap down the bank upon Black, and rescue the poor wretch, when a hand upon my arm and a voice arrested me.

“Well done! he has saved us the trouble!”

It was Fitz. I was inexpressibly relieved—for this terrible concatenation of murder and madness had almost shaken my reason too, and I felt the need of some one near me less deeply excited than myself. Fitz took the matter with wonderful sangfroid.

“I wonder how he happened over this way,” he continued. “Never heard of one man’s hanging another alone before!—but they say madmen have the strength of seven men in them!”

“For God’s sake,” said I, “let’s cut him down!—it is too dreadful!”

“Pshaw, man! You’re not case-hardened! It had to be done—he’d as well do it as any one else!”

The maniac had by this time drawn the body up to the limb, and bringing the end of the lariat several times around a small sapling, he secured it there. Then perceiving us for the first time, he broke into that infernal hideous laugh I had heard before, and pointing with his finger to the dangling corpse, commenced leaping and tossing his body to and fro in the strangest gyrations

—gnashing his teeth—then laughing again, and shouting in broken sentences too incoherently for me to understand.

Suddenly his mood seemed to change. Observing us steadily for a moment, as we stood silently above him, he glanced quickly up at the body and muttered—"They want it, Mary! Hush! hush, honey! they shant!" and slowly crouching his body, his distended eyes fixed on us with that furtive burning light in them peculiar to a panther about to spring, he crept cautiously along the leaves on his hands and knees towards us, keeping the trunks of the trees interposed, as that animal would have done when attempting a surprise. Even Fitz was terrified by this strange manœuvre, and with the instinct of the backwoodsman in all circumstances of danger, cocked his rifle. The madman was dragging after him his battered but heavy gun-barrel, which, from the traces of fresh blood I saw upon it, had no doubt been used first in disabling Davis, in the same way that it was now to be used upon one or both of us. For the moment I was utterly at a loss what to do, and found my hand involuntarily clutching at the triggers of my own gun, as I watched the cold, sly, concentrated ferocity with which this worse than wild beast was nearing us for the deadly bound. The thought of shooting was only a momentary thing—that would be worse than all the horrors! I whispered hurriedly to Fitz—"Don't shoot! club your gun for Heaven's sake—we can knock him down!" The words had scarcely passed my lips before with a wild yell the creature sprang towards us with his gun-barrel swung high in the air. I was nearest to him, and remember a blow like the falling of a tree upon me, which crushed down the parry I had attempted with my rifle-barrel; and as I was reeling in the fall, a dark figure bounding past me from behind, a fiercer yell, and the struggling of many feet—and darkness rushed over my senses.

A Sombrero full of water dashed into my face brought me to myself. Castro, who had just administered this primitive but most effectual prescription for the cure of obliviousness, was standing over me, grinning with pleasure, though the blood was streaming down his forehead. Hays stood by him bareheaded and panting. Fitz was reclining on the leaves, looking very pale, and evidently badly hurt. The maniac,

gnashing his teeth and howling fearfully, lay stretched upon his back, his limbs securely bound with a lariat. His face was wretchedly disfigured, from the severe blows it had been necessary to inflict before he could be subdued. Hays told me that he and Castro had been following the trail of Davis, and hearing the strange noises Black was making, had set off in the direction of them at a run, and had arrived just in time to see me fall, and fortunately to save Fitz, who had nobly forborne to shoot until it would have been too late, for he was staggering under the tremendous blows which the madman was dealing at him. I found that I was more stunned than seriously injured, and was on my feet very soon; the back of my head had been bleeding freely, but the hurt was not severe.

It was now nearly dark, and Hays fired his rifle to bring assistance. We then examined the scene of the novel execution, a part of which I had witnessed. There were evidences of a desperate struggle, and on cutting down the body of Davis, we saw that he had received several blows of the gun-barrel, which had no doubt partially disabled him, before even the desperate strength of the madman could have been sufficient to run him up unassisted. We came to the conclusion that Black, who had shown symptoms of insanity some time before, had been driven stark mad by the excitement of the affair with the Mexican robbers; and having in some way lost his horse during the search for Agatone, had been wandering about since through the woods, until chance brought him and Davis together; and that having heard Davis's name associated with Agatone's escape during Bill's narrative, he had offered him up to appease the ghosts of his murdered family. From all that had dropped from him, it was evident the imagination that they were pursuing him, clamoring for vengeance night and day that they might be permitted to go to their graves in peace, had deranged him. That Fitz and myself had suddenly appeared, to his distempered fancy, enemies who came to rob his "Mary" of the victim he had sacrificed to her restless manes, was clear enough, when we remembered what he was muttering when he commenced so unexpectedly and viciously to creep upon us.

Castro's warriors now came galloping up. They reported to

him the fresh trail of a horse ridden at full speed, leading into the Rancho from this direction. We were singularly puzzled to conjecture who this horseman could possibly be. It could hardly be one of Agatone's men, escaped from the fray of the morning, for we had taken all their horses. They had traced this rider back to within a few hundred yards of where we were; and from signs which Indians and all experienced trailers read with unerring precision, they were convinced that he had passed within two hours. Hearing Hays' gun, they had dismounted, and sent on three of their best trailers to keep the track while they came to us. While we were discussing this curious item of news with great interest and eagerness, a deep, prolonged whoop, from the direction opposite to that by which the Indians had approached, announced a new comer, and in another moment the tall figure of Bill Johnson was seen indistinctly through the faint twilight, parting the brush before his long strides. At his heels came the three Indian trailers.

"Hurrah! here's the old Otter-dog—he's got the news!" shouted Fitz, feebly. "How is it, Bill?" "Who's that fellow on the horse?" "Got another brush to show, old boy?" "Come, fork over the news;" "Shell out, old coon!" &c., exclaimed one and another as he strode into our midst.

Bringing the butt of his rifle carefully to the ground, he crossed his hands over the muzzle, leaned his chin upon them, and while his sharp black eyes twinkled rapidly over the scene, the rest of his face looked as if it had been cut in stone. The broad moon, which had been up some time, streamed in sufficient light through the trees to enable him to see with tolerable distinctness.

"Whar's the Kern?" he drawled out, and then, in the same breath, "Ye've been stringin' up that pole-cat thar, have yer?"

"Black did it," said Hays. At this moment Bill's eye fell upon the figure of Black, which lay writhing to and fro with low moanings on the ground. He started as if a snake had struck him, while his eyes flamed again. "Look here, fellers, Bill Johnson don't stand this!" and before any one could interpose or explain, he had drawn a knife from his belt, and with

one long stride stood over Black, and was rapidly severing the thongs which bound his limbs.

"Bill, for God's sake don't!—he's raving mad—he'll knock down right and left!" said Fitz rapidly, while the party scattered on all sides.

"Tarnation!" roared Bill, furiously, as he assisted the madman to his feet; "Yer white-livered younkers! and these cow-hide strings 'nough to make a man like Jim Black rarein' tearin' mad? Tie a hunter like some chicken-stealin' sneak in the States, will yer? just for hangin' a man, too! Pretty spot o' work! got any bull-neck Judges; got any weazen faced lawyers out here to swindle a man's rights away, have yer? mad, is he? Try to serve Bill Johnson so if yer want to see somebody mad. Who done this? Knock down as many as you please, Jim Black; Bill Johnson's here, and old Sue."

I heard the 'clicking of rifle-locks around me at this. Bill patted the madman heavily on the shoulder as he gave him this last exhortation to avenge the indignity which it seemed he hastily supposed had been put upon him. Black, who had been standing in a sort of stupor, was thoroughly roused by the friendly blow, and glaring his eyes in the face of his old comrade for a moment, with a loud guttural shriek sprang suddenly at his throat. Nobody interfered, and now the stern and powerful hunter exhibited his finest traits. His iron fingers tore away the frantic grasp of the madman from his throat; then closing with him he clasped him in the bear-hug of those long heavy arms.

Black was a very strong man at any time, and inflamed as all his energies now were with the preternatural fires of maniac rage, it required the full exertion of all the huge strength for which Bill was remarkable to cope with him. We looked on with intense interest, for everybody present, like myself, was uncertain and curious as to whether Bill's indignant and abrupt course had been the result of sheer simplicity—mistaking the sense of the expression "madness,"—of a sagacious intuition of the treatment proper in such a case, or confidence in his own resources. For a moment or so the figures of the two men were tossed to and fro in the uncertain light, linked and writhing in a stern, silent, and desperate struggle. It seemed to me that Bill's

object was to quell and overbear the madman by the weight of physical superiority without hurting him. I shuddered, when, as they whirled by close to me, I perceived the cause of the ominous silence of the madman. His teeth were clenched in the shoulder of the Trapper, whose pale face as it gleamed past was rigid and calm as ever. A sudden change came over the aspect of the combat. The two figures were perfectly still for a moment—then that of Black gradually sank towards the ground. I stepped close to them and saw that Bill, by the tremendous power of his hug, had paralysed him by pressure on the spine. With his back bending in, the grip of his teeth loosened as he sank upon his knees.

At that moment, while Bill stooped over him, their eyes met. The two figures seemed at once to be frozen into a deathlike pause, while their eyes were riveted upon each other. It seemed to me that those of Bill were emitting a keen and palpable flame that steadily searched the depths of the brain beneath him. There was something terrible and ghost-like in his white stony face, lit with that calm weird light, heightened by a broad fleck of the moon's rays that fell upon it through an opening in the trees. I could scarcely breathe with the excitement—half of awe—which fell upon me as I looked on this intense scene. The glare of animal ferocity rapidly faded from the fascinated gaze of the madman; the spasmodic contraction of his features subsided—his muscles were unstrung from their tension.

Bill, yet gazing steadily into his eyes, gently shook off his grasp as he loosened his own hold, and then straightening himself, lifted him slowly up with him to his feet. Black's spell-led eyes still followed the face of his conqueror for an instant; he then drew the back of his rough and gore-encrusted hand quickly across them, and, bursting into tears, with a convulsive sob that seemed to be tearing up the very foundations of his life, reeled to one side and fell heavily to the earth. Not a few long breaths were drawn by those around me—the majority of whom were as much terrified as astonished at this extraordinary *dénouement* of a most wonderful scene.

All had observed the mastery Bill's eyes had exhibited over this, to them, mysterious distemper, and some regarded it as a

supernatural display ; particularly Castro and his Indians, who looked upon the Trapper with expressions, ludicrously mingled, of awe, humility, and affright. Bill had ordered water to be brought from the river, of which Black, who had fallen from excessive weakness—the collapse of his long excitement—drank with inconceivable eagerness. He seemed so subdued, I hoped for a moment that the spell had passed from off his soul ; but there was the same incoherence and wandering evident as soon as he was able to speak ; and when any of us came very near him, the same disposition to injure us. Bill alone could control him—at a single glance from whose eye he became humble again. I should not have been particularly astonished at the simple fact that Bill's eyes, or the eyes of any other man of great firmness, should have exerted this absolute power over a madman ; for that such a power had long been known to exist and been used by occasional individuals in the treatment and management of lunatics, I was perfectly aware ; but what did surprise me was, that this uncultivated Trapper, who had probably never seen or heard of a medical book in his life, and as probably never saw a madman before, should have seemed so securely conscious of possessing this unusual power as to have trusted to it calmly through a scene of so much peril. How and where he could have picked up this knowledge, was a question I determined in my own mind to have settled on the first opportunity.

In the meantime arrangements were made to return to the Colonel's Rancho. The body of Davis was thrown into the river ; Black was mounted upon the horse of a Lipan, the lariat of which Bill held as he led off the party on the return. Hays, Fitz, and several others of the Rangers who had joined us, were discussing and accounting for the late scene with great earnestness, in their own way, as we walked on, some vowing it was one thing, others another ; but most inclined to regard it with superstition. Finding that no light was to be gained from them, I determined to join Bill, who was moodily striding on alone, and try whether I could draw him into a communicative humor. It had occurred to me that the effect had been purely accidental. But this view I was almost disposed to discard on remembering

Bill's steady and methodical management from the time he caught the madman's eye. I had observed a trait of superstition in his own character, and was not surprised when I found him very mysterious and difficult of approach on the subject. I soon perceived that he himself did not understand the origin of the power, and it was only after a great deal of cross-questioning and urging, that I could get a hint of the source from which he had originally received the suggestion.

It appeared from what he let fall, that years ago, in one of his trapping expeditions towards the head waters of the Platte, he had met with three men—two Americans and a half-breed Indian—whose sole occupation seemed to be that of catching mustangs. These, after being captured, the Half-breed would render perfectly tame in a few hours—so much so that they would follow him about the prairie, and come to him at his call. A wolf was captured and tamed in as short a time, and as effectually. The Half-breed had been very mysterious as to his mode of proceeding, and announced that he bewitched them—but added, also, that he *could*, for a “compensation” commensurate with the value of the important secret, impart it to others. Bill had collected a very valuable pack of beaver pelts, and so deeply had he been interested and impressed, that without any hesitation he had offered them in exchange for the secret. This, after some demur, the cunning Half-breed had agreed to, first binding Bill over to secrecy by the most fantastic rites and solemn oaths. Under these injunctions the secret had been communicated, and of course was beyond my reach. Bill said he had often tried the “spell,” as he called it, upon the wildest and most ferocious animals with perfect success when he could get them “cornered” long enough for it to work. That he had been equally successful with men who had the “tremblers” (delirium tremens) upon them after a spree.

I had often heard of these “wild horse tamers,” as they are called, and felt great curiosity with regard to them. It added not a little to the interest I already felt in the character of my long-sided friend, the Trapper, to find that he belonged to this mysterious fraternity. Without having witnessed, as yet, any of their feats, I had, under a theory of my own, been disposed to classify them among the unexplained phenomena of mesmerism; which

last designation would, indeed, include all the apparent facts of the embryo science. Bill had never heard of mesmerism, though, and the suspicion that he had stumbled unawares upon the existence of a physical law, of the nature of which he, in common with its more learned advocates, was profoundly ignorant, had crossed my mind more than once. It was interesting to have thus traced it back to a seeming connexion, heretofore unsuspected, with influences producing inexplicable effects in two classes of well-known facts—the taming of madmen and wild beasts. I had afterwards the opportunity of examining this curious subject with greater minuteness, and satisfying myself more definitely as to the plausibility of my new theory.

CHAPTER XVI.

'FIXIN'' A YELLER BELLY.

WE met the Colonel with the Bravo and his party near the rancho, returning bootless from their search pushed in another direction.

The Colonel's sagacity had also discovered the trail of the strange horseman which had so much puzzled us, though the recollection of it had been for the time overcome by the late incidents. Without waiting to hear more of the details we had to give than the simple intelligence that Davis had been hung by Black—which he seemed to consider a matter-of-course incident—he insisted upon Bill's report about Agatone, and explanation, if he had any to give, of the tracks.

Bill proceeded in his quaint vernacular to inform us that he had proceeded with Castro and the Indians to the place in Big Bend Bottom, where he had at first seen the three men, of whom the person supposed to be Agatone was riding behind one of the others—the Lieutenant, probably—whom he shot. That here he and Castro had taken their trail again and followed it with the most minute care, examining every tree near the *trunk* of which it passed, to see whether he had been pushed up into it to hide among the long moss. The Indians were spread out on every side to look for the traces of his footsteps, so that every square yard of the ground for some distance on both sides of the trail had been carefully examined up to the point where he, by cutting across, had intercepted the horsemen, and seen, to his astonishment, that the man riding behind had disappeared. Here Castro had taken Davis's trail, which he followed in to the rancho, as we

have detailed. His Indians he had sent back to beat the woods in every direction again, with no better success than before.

"Arter the red-skins war gone," said Bill, "I squats upon er old log—for, boys, I tell you Bill Johnson war clean dumb-founded! This Agatone's gittin' away so cute tuck the shine out er anything I know'd. Thinks I, whar *is* the little weasel got to? He cant've flewed, sure enough. Then I thunk of that half-an'-half skunk an' wildcat Davis!—what could er brought him out here? He come fer sumphin, sure! I ups upon my pegs an' made er bee-line for the place whar his trail come in to jine Agatone's. I tuck on it and follered it backwards er long time rounder-boutin' an' twistifyin' as if he war lookin' for sumphin. It brung me at last 'way 'round the bottom to a chaparal, jest in the direction they were makin' for when Agatone sloped so surprisin'. What der ye think, boys! I found a place tramped whar a horse had been standin' hitched since daybreak, maybe, till jest er while before. If I'd er only been a leetle sooner, I'd er had him! I found his fresh tracks on the ground, an' whar the horse had dunged when he started. It war warm. Maybe I didn't tare my wool and cuss a little! He war off—'twarnt worth while ter sweat. I tuck the back track of his little boots that war plain enough, and may I be catawampussed, boys, but he'd been hid in the moss up one er them live oaks I'd looked up inter twenty times ter-day."

"But how the deuce did he get thar, Bill; you said you looked up all the trees?" said Fitz, breathlessly.

"Ah! that war the cunninest trick that ever er Yaller-belly war up ter yet. Them fellers *war* up ter trailin'—they know'd they had a trailer arter 'em too. I told yer we *did* look up all the trees whar ther trail led close to. Thar war a grape vine, the bigness er my wrist, hangin' down a little way frum a limb twenty feet out frum ther body of the tree. It war pretty high up, too; a man sitting on er horse couldn't a reached it. The little monkey must er stood up on ther horse's back behind the feller I shot, and while ther horse war goin' at a gallop—for the tracks warn't broke, I look'd out sharp for that—he grabbed the grape vine and swung off, then eased himself up on the limb and hid in the moss!"

"Hurrah ! by jingo, that beats Davy Crockett !" "Good ! Agatone will do !" "He's a keener !" were the exclamations which here interrupted Bill's narrative.

The Rangers were too much of woodsmen themselves not to appreciate and admire heartily so dexterous a game as this, though played by an enemy to their own discomfiture.

"Then he must have laid close up there, that you nor the Indians could see him, Bill ?"

"Yes, thar war a heap er moss on ther tree—ye might er walked under a bar all day and not seed him !"

"He must have stayed there all day, too, until the Indians came away, or they would have found his track ?"

"The cunnin' little rascal laid low an' kept dark 'till they were all gone ; then he come down and skooted for ther horse."

"Yes, the infernal old hag sent Davis out thar with a fresh horse for him, and the news that we were coming out to look for him, that's how it was," muttered the Colonel.

"But how," suggested I, "could she have got the news that his horse had been wounded by your shot that night ?"

"He must have had some fellows with him, and left them outside the Rancho ; one of them, you know, shot at me on the log. The others, I expect, were waiting for him out, and he sent one of them back to tell her that night. Davis was to leave the horse at the chaparal, but having the news about us, the traitor went to look for him in the Bend, and that's what made his trail so round-abouting, as Bill says !"

"That war ther way it come."

"But, Bill, you followed the trail of Agatone's horse up, didn't you ?"

"For sartin I did ! I went back ter the chaparal, tuck it, and war nosein' it up close when I hern the rifle Captain here fired. Then I cum'd jam agin Castro's three red-skins, who war follerin' it backwards."

"So he's housed, Colonel, you see, snug enough for to-night," said Hays.

"Yes," growled he, "snug enough if I don't burn him out before morning. He slipped in just before Davis got away, I expect,

and that in the broad daylight too. He won't get out again so easy, or I'm mistaken."

"But where was Black all this time?" asked I of Bill, as he was turning off.

"He tuck off through the woods soon as we left yer at the ford; didn't see him any more till I com'd whar these green younkens had been insultin' his arms with their dirty strings!"

Nobody who heard the last speech of the Colonel suspected him, even remotely, of joking in the threats he let fall. He had appeared so moodily absorbed since it had been made evident that his enemy was near him—almost within his reach—with only wooden walls interposed between them—that it was hard for those who knew him best to conjecture what his surly and desperate hate might *not* do before morning. That he was fiercely determined this night should settle the long account between Agatone and himself at whatever risk, soon became clear enough. He went aside with Bill and Hays, and held a long consultation. We, in the meantime, despatched a hasty meal. They then came forward and joined us. After all were through, the Colonel picked up six-shooter, and seemed to be examining it attentively, then raised his head suddenly as if a new thought had struck him.

"Boys," said he, grinning hideously, "what do you say to a whole-hog out-and-out frolic to-night?"

"I'm for it," said one.

"I'm thar!" said Texas. "What is it, *Colonel*?"

"Fellers, we must have Agatone, any how!"

"In course—but how?"

"Well, we can stampede the sheep-pen—you know that's outside the gate; maybe they'll be fools enough to come out; we can make a rush at the gate then."

"She's too sharp for that, *Colonel*!"

With a rasping chuckle and vicious significant leer he merely said, as he turned off, "I smell something burning—maybe *she* will!"

"Ha! that's the game! She'll burn blue? won't she, *Colonel*?" was said by some one as they all rose to get their weapons,

without another syllable of comment upon this monstrous proposition being considered as called for by these matter-of-fact personages. The idea of setting fire to the houses of three or four hundred unoffending human beings, that the insane hate of three or four men might be gratified with the prospect of any amount of indiscriminate slaughter, was too infernally rich not to be revelled in by these chivalric pioneers of the blessings of civilization and free institutions! What were Mexican women and children born for but to afford them the amusement of seeing them roast! This cool diabolicism, though it could not fail, under any circumstances, to shock me, yet had at least the merit of novelty—it was anomalous in my experience of life, and, so far as curiosity went, attractive. Opposition I knew would avail nothing, and merely subject me to suspicion and personal danger; besides the companionship of peril which I had voluntarily offered to share with them left me no choice but to see them through. My probable compunctions and whatever of humanity I had left on hand, ought to have been looked to before I had placed myself in such relations. As it was, I made the most of a bad move, and endeavored to look forward to the anticipated “barbecue of Yellow Bellies,” as some one jocosely called it, with as vividly pleasurable sensations as I could summon.

The fact unquestionably was, that this Rancho had long been the greatest nuisance of this frontier. Pretending to be friendly to the Texans, the old Senora Cavillo had secretly aided and encouraged the worst of the border depredators, and the storm of vengeance for several years had been muttering upon her horizon. The Texans had been too few in this region for some time to attempt her destruction, and now that a number—possibly sufficient—had been brought together, and that under circumstances of so much immediate exasperation against her, there was no telling what might be the result of this night’s work. I had, unconsciously perhaps, assimilated very much in my feelings towards the Mexicans with the tone of those around me, and that was characterized by the most deadly and unutterable scorn.

The two races in this country have no sympathy in common but that of hatred; on the one side the malignant assassin hate of

coward and conscious inferiority—on the other, the contemptuous exterminating hate of domineering brutality—secure in superior energies, and as destitute of magnanimity as it is grasping. This scorn is a very convenient sentiment, by the way, too often assumed by natures having in them generous susceptibilities, as the readiest mitigation, and higher name for any harsh outbreak of licentious passion upon inferiors.

It is hard for warlike men to display chivalry towards an ignoble foe; ordinarily courtesy calls forth courtesy, and so with its opposite. It is thus on this frontier, that where true bravery exists still, it has most frequently degenerated into a fierce relentlessness, while mere cut-throat ferocity is as frequently mistaken for the nobler virtue. There is little call for the higher traits of the civilized soldier, and they are as little known as valued. From the observation of such facts, I, as well, strongly incline to doubt, whether—with all the parade that has been so popular with regard to the prodigies of Texan valor—that population would prove at all superior, if even equal to the “corn-stalk militia” of any one of the older States upon an equal field against an equal foe. They may very well afford to fight Mexicans five to one—as the boast is—when not more than one in that five can fire his gun without shutting his eyes; besides, the yet more important fact is, that the social virtues of which the Texans have confessedly as yet had no overplus to boast, are the truest and most certain incentives of heroism. The best soldiers are the best sons, and fathers, and citizens. They have desperadoes enough, such as these men were, who feared neither God nor man, it would seem; but desperadoes are not always the surest soldiers—they are ever liable to being panic-stricken when attacked on the blind side, or when called upon to meet danger in any unsuspected or unusual way.

These are general observations which apply to a population in which too many of the extremes meet for anything very consistent to be looked for. The truth is, I was gradually becoming Texan myself, under the rapid process of “case-hardening” to which these men around me had been in turn subjected; and that the incrustation of habit was insensibly forming over the moral sense, I became occasionally aware at such times as this, when I found

myself so readily sophisticating—so easily reconciled—though conditions absolutely horrifying in themselves were presented. This consciousness would make me extremely restless then, and even the recollection of it now makes me perhaps splenetically uncharitable towards these men. The hate engendered through years of mutual wrongs had not yet in my case been kindled into a fierce devouring flame which made a hell at the heart and madness in the brain ; yet this had been so with them, and with consequences such as I have described, and shall proceed to show, occurring *within a few days* ! judge what the *years* of such a life must have been !

Black, who might have been a serious and unmanageable incumbrance to a design requiring great secrecy, had fortunately fallen asleep, after devouring, like a famished wild beast, an enormous meal. We set off in silence for the Rancho, accompanied by Castro and his warriors on foot. They were sent ahead with orders to seize, without noise, any straggler they might find, to prevent the alarm being given. The moon was out very bright, but her rays penetrated feebly beneath the dense umbrage of the forest as we approached the log-bridge of which I have spoken.

We had nearly reached this difficult passage, when a sudden commotion among the Indians announced that something had happened. There was a scattering, crashing, and scrambling through the thickets for a moment—a stifled cry—and they came out dragging among them a prisoner ! Who should it be, trembling in a mortal panic, but Master Antone, whose unaccountable disappearance after the capture of Davis had since been frequently commented upon in no mincing terms. Indeed, every one suspected him of too warm a sympathy for the traitor, and friendship for the old Senora ; and threats had been let fall which now, it appeared, were to be executed. I saw there would be little chance for him when Castro reported that he had heard him or some one else run from a thicket close to the Colonel's Rancho, when we came out, and that, suspecting he would make for the log, he had intercepted him. This placed Sir Braggadocio under the unpleasant imputation of having added the character of spy to his many salient qualities. The proposition was made instanter to

swing him up to the nearest limb. The Indians, first binding his mouth to keep him quiet, proceeded to halter him. I had witnessed enough of such murders for one day, and was unwilling to see this harmless wretch lose his life so uneeremoniously; though I saw as well that the men were too fiercely roused to be entirely diverted from their purpose of vengeance. I proposed that we should throw him off the log into the river, tighten and secure the rope just sufficiently to keep his head above water, and leave him there to drown at his leisure—intending myself to come back and release him so soon as I could get away from the party. The novelty of this proposition won for it success; and with low hearty chucklings of laughter, which could hardly be restrained from bursting into shouts, they dragged the miserable rascal to the log, and, after securely swathing his mouth, plumped him off into the water. Hays, who understood my motive, assisted me with great zeal in adjusting the rope. The rapidity of the stream soon brought him up on the surface of the water, at full length, below the log. There we left him stretched—his hands clenched desperately on the rope, to prevent it tightening to suffocation around his throat—playing to and fro, like a hooked trout on the current, the violence of which would now and then take him clear under suddenly, to bob up again as quickly—a rather funny, but not very dangerous predicament, so long as the strength of his arms lasted. The knave fully deserved the punishment, severe as it was, and we left him to the darkness and to the infinite agonies of *such* suspense! All but Hays and myself expected him to drown of course, which would be inevitable so soon as his arms gave out; and the diabolical ingenuity of such a mode of torturing to death gained me great applause, and entirely reinstated me in the confidence of the Colonel, which had been greatly shaken by my officious *humanity* on a former occasion. I was now pronounced worthy of Texas!!

When we were all over the log the Colonel proceeded to explain more fully the plan of operation determined upon, and having assigned each one his post, we commenced approaching the rancho with the precaution necessary to insure against giving the alarm. The time for making active demonstrations was fixed for midnight; until then we were to occupy separately certain loca-

tions which brought every side of the rancho under the eye of some one, so that Agatone might be foiled in any attempt to escape prematurely. We were then to draw up in two detachments near the great gate on each side, and wait the result of the intended manœuvre. The position assigned me was on the river bank, near some huts outside the picketing. I was rejoiced at this chance, for it gave me the opportunity I desired of creeping back and rescuing Antone.

I waited until the men, who were cautiously moving off to their different posts, had all disappeared. I then slid lower down the bank, and was starting off noiselessly under its shadow, when a faint "whist!" sounded near me, suspended my steps. As I turned, a figure, emerging from the loose sand in which it had been covered, sprang up, and showed me the cunning elfish face of the boy John. He came close to me, and peering up into my face with a saucy leer, whispered,

"Ha! ha! ye'r gwine to help him worry the old cat some to-night—is ye?"

The first thought which crossed my mind on seeing the boy—excited and anxious as I felt for the life of Antone, who might give out any minute—was not surprise that he should be in such a place and so concealed, but that he was the very person to be sent to save the poor fellow. His size and dexterity would enable him to reach the log much sooner than I could, without the fear of giving the alarm. So catching him by the arm, I drew him with me to a more shaded place, slipped a piece of money into his hand, and hastily explaining the circumstances, promised him more money if he would go and extricate Antone as quickly as possible. He heard me through, and at my urgency bounded off rapidly, saying—"Never mind; I'll *fix* him for ye, boss!"

It was not until the creature was out of sight, that I thought of the strange, vicious significance of the look with which that promise had been made. I had been too greatly flurried to think of or observe anything but the getting him off in time—for Antone had now been in the water half an hour, and there was not a moment to be lost. I instantly associated that peculiar look with a fact I had heard the Texan laughing about—namely, that while we were gone to Bexar after the Rangers, Antone had

accused John to the Colonel of stealing from his pork barrel—which, it will be remembered, was the truth—and that this, together with other causes of exasperation, had gained for John a most brutally severe beating at the hands of the Colonel; recollecting, too, the boy's reputation for malignancy, it at once flashed upon me that he intended to make this the opportunity of a vengeance, the extent of which it would be hard to conjecture.

I set off on the moment at my best speed, to counteract, if possible, what might be the consequences of my inconsiderate haste. My progress was slow enough—for to prevent discovery it was necessary to creep close under the bank next to the water's edge—and my hurry and impatience did not improve the rapidity of my progress. Now slipping down the crumbling bank into the water—then wading through the slush and mire until I could drag myself out by a bush, I succeeded at last in reaching a point near the log, where I could safely ascend among the trees on to firm ground. I paused a minute to listen, and could distinguish the sound of heavy splashing and struggles in the water, and a subdued guttural noise like smothered laughter, and now and then a plunge as of some object falling. I stepped noiselessly forward to where I could command a view of the log. The figure of the boy lay crouched on the middle of the bridge. Observing him a moment, I saw that he was holding on with his feet, and one hand, while with the other he was thrusting a long pole violently down at the hands and head of the wretched Antone, evidently with the hope of breaking his despairing grasp of the rope, or thrusting his head beneath the water. He accompanied every blow with a hissing laugh and some such exclamations as—

"It's me! It's John!—he! he! I telled ye so—I said I'd fix you—cussed Yaller Belly! he! he! Let go, will ye, honey! Tell old Red-Head on John agin? I'll spile them blinkers for ye! yah! yah! ha! ha!"—and the little fiend eased himself up on the log to indulge a heartier burst of merriment at his success in having struck one of the eyes of the victim, which were already almost bursting from their sockets, as they upturned in the spasm of a mute imploring agony.

I had in the meantime been approaching him unobserved and

at this moment stood over him, and saw that the pain caused by this last savage expedient had compelled Antone to quit his hold upon the rope, and in an instant it had tightened upon his throat. Enraged beyond all restraint at the ferocious and unparalleled deviltry of the young murderer, I, without any warning or consideration, struck him a violent blow which knocked him off the log, and the swift stream instantly swept him out of sight. I then laid my gun on the log, and, cutting loose the rope, with the end in my hand sprang off into the water. I was a good swimmer, and seizing the body of Antone made for the bank. The force of the current swept me down a long distance, and, encumbered as I was, I should hardly have succeeded in reaching the shore with my burden, but that the favorable accident of my being swept in reach of the twigs of a tree which leaned far over the current, allowed me to drag myself and it out with great difficulty. Loosening the rope, and tearing open his shirt, I found to my relief that the heart still fluttered faintly—and when I tore the bandage from his mouth the water poured forth copiously.

It was several hours before the wretched Antone had sufficiently recovered for me to leave him. The fright, the drenching, and the blows he had received from the boy, united, had almost annihilated what energies of life there were in his shrivelled carcase. With his crushed eye, and the ghastly saffron of his face, he was a sufficiently unpleasing companion beneath the glooms of that deep forest, which were only fitfully informed with moonlight. I was glad enough when I saw him able to sit up unassisted, and rose to leave him, for I could do nothing more now. He was not strong enough to walk to the Rancho, leaving out of the question the impossibility of his obtaining admission there, even should he reach it. Besides, I had merely compromised with my own conscience in saving the life of the miserable creature; and now that had been accomplished, I felt no special “yearning of the spirit” towards him, which might keep me at his side to comfort him in the darkness; and truly did he seem to need a comforter.

When he saw that I was going to leave him he clung frantically to my limbs, and with the idiotic mouthings of his terror made a most dismal pleading for me to stay. It was time for me to be

at my post, and for fear the moans of even this reptile humanity might move me too much, I shook his clenched grip violently off and started hastily for the Rancho. His voice followed me—as I struggled through the dense brush—for some distance. The creature's feeble wits had been temporarily addled by the night's work. Hideous as portions of it had been, and painful as those sounds were, I remember—just as they were dying away—that I burst into a hearty laugh as the ludicrous contrast presented itself of valiant Sir Braggadocio Antone, in the glory of one of his boasting feats, and the writhing, pitiable thing I had just left. The nerves, when unstrung through scenes like these, grow unnaturally impressible, and vibrate to strange humors. One feels sometimes as though he *would* laugh though tottering on the sheer brink of some red shaft to Tartarus. Curious problem!—this monstrous trinity, Man—part fiend, part angel, and part brute.

It would require a strong reliance upon the evidence of things unseen, to suppose any part of him could be developed in such a life as that on this frontier, other than his fiend and brute natures.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

I REACHED the log—recovered my gun, and set off for my post the way I came—along under the bank of the river. Midnight, I knew, was very near if not passed, and this was the time for the attack upon the Rancho to commence. It would be disgraceful for me to fail of being there at the crisis. I hurried on regardless of mud and water, for the last few hours had sufficiently familiarized me with both. I soon gained a point where, from the top of a bank, sheltered by the trees, I could command a perfect view of the Rancho beneath the clear moonlight. The intervening space was open, with the exception of a few scattered trees. Its low, square bulk looked as dark as death; not a glimmer of light or the faintest sound came from it. The great gate was in front of me. A little to the left, and separated by a short interval, was the lower picketing of the sheep-pen—a large inclosure in which the immense flocks of sheep and goats belonging to such Ranchos are collected at night. These creatures are easily “stampeded” or frightened, and will make noise enough to wake the seven sleepers, in the effort to escape. I saw the figures of men stealthily gliding from tree to tree as they approached the gate, or creeping around the Rancho picketing beneath its shadows towards the same point; so I was just in time.

It occurred to me from the caution with which the men moved that they had perceived evidences of alertness on the part of the people of the Rancho, which I had not suspected. According to the plan of attack we were to lie in wait on each side of the

gate, to be ready for a rush if it should be thrown open for the shepherds to come out to quiet their flocks. Already the hoarse bark of the shepherd dogs had announced to the silence that something was wrong. This is a very noble and fierce race of these animals, original in, and peculiar to, Mexico. They are taken when young, and being nourished at the dugs of a she-goat ever afterwards live with the flock, a foster-child and a protector. Their deep-mouthed savage baying seemed now about to precipitate matters. The men threw themselves flat upon the ground, while the crash of broken bars was followed by the sudden and stunning clatter and ba-a-ing of near a thousand panic-stricken animals. I took instant advantage of the confusion to glide over the interval unnoticed, and take my place in the nearest party of the Rangers. The dogs came through the broken bars along with their maddened and rushing charge. They dashed upon us at once. The men, who had been ordered not to fire, were prepared to dispose of this difficulty very quietly, and at a few strokes of their long, heavy bowie knives, emphasized by a muttered curse or so, the most fierce of the gallant fellows were silenced.

A very large old white bitch sprang so suddenly at the Colonel's throat, that he had a severe struggle before he shook her off with a cloven skull. He had been standing near the gate of the pen, which he had broken the moment after throwing the wolf-skin among the flock which had caused the panic. The men around me could scarcely suppress their laughter while he was engaged in this novel battle ; while he who had been sufficiently chafed before, was rendered wildly furious by the startle of absolute danger from a quarter so unexpected.

In the meantime the people of the Rancho were aroused, as the confusion of voices and hurrying to and fro of lights sufficiently showed. The idea flashed through my mind that *everybody* seemed to wake up very suddenly ; for, judging from the clamors inside, every soul in the Rancho must have been astir in a few minutes. Suddenly there was an entire lull of these sounds, and we heard bolts and chains rattling at the gate. The moment these sounds reached us, the Colonel bounded to the side of the gate where it opened outwards. He said in a sharp, eager whis-

per, "Ready, boys!—follow me;" and then crouching close to the wall, I could see his dim figure against it bent in the attitude for springing, and his eyes literally emitting flames in the concentration of his fury. We all shifted our positions in preparation for bounding quickly up. It was a pulseless pause. There seemed to be some difficulty in getting the gate open, while we forgot to breathe in watching the moment when it would swing back.

This unaccountable stillness, so simultaneous, and only broken now by the noise at the gate—for the flock was far enough off running like mad—struck me as ominous, and it proved to be so with a vengeance. Instead of the gate being thrown open, there was a sudden commotion on the top of the high picketing just over it; and before we could think what it meant, a shower of some fluid was suddenly plumped upon the heads of the Colonel and those who were nearest him. A portion of it was spattered upon me, and I felt that it was hot as lava. The convulsive spring and the involuntary yell of agony which followed from those upon whom this fiery benediction fell most bountifully, bore witness to its singular fervency. Two or three figures were visible for an instant on the top of the picketing, one of which I thought was that of the old Señora. A shrill, taunting laugh broke from it, which reminded me of all that would be hideous in the quaverings of a dozen screech-owls united in one prolonged scream; while the arms were tossed wildly to and fro for a moment, and, as we fired, it suddenly disappeared. It was the old Jezebel beyond a doubt. We had been much too discomfited and flurried; it was uncertain whether we had hit any of them! The fact that that infernal laugh still continued to be heard, even above the jubilant triumphing roar of the Mexicans inside, settled this doubt. We had been nicely overreached.

A rich scene was now presented. The Colonel was on the ground rolling, writhing, and moaning with the pain, while others of the party, in various postures, were making no less expressive demonstrations. There was a strong smell of tallow in the air, and the clothes of the unfortunates rapidly whiteued as the fluid cooled, until they looked like anticking ghosts in the moonlight.

"He, he!" chuckled Bill, who was at my side and had in a

great measure escaped, "how hot it is, Colonel—told you she war kin to old split-foot!"

Nothing but his broad-brimmed hat and buckskins had saved the Colonel from instant death ; as it was, between the exquisite agony and his baffled rage, he was quite frantic. He howled out a furious imprecation in answer to this quaintly-timed jest, and rising, staggered towards Bill, as I thought, with the intention of striking him. He only seized him by the arm and shook him violently, then thrusting his purple and distorted face close to that of the Trapper, he said in a sharp whisper, while his lips were perfectly rigid—

"We'll try it on HER, Bill Johnson!—we'll roast her—wont we, Bill—alive?"

"Kern, it no use—she wont burn—but we'll try."

Bill said this in a stern, lowered voice, and with something like an expression of hopelessness which struck me as caused by the superstition which had taken hold on him with regard to the old Señora. The men were clamorous—such of them as had been scalded—with ungovernable rage ; and cries of "strike a fire,"—"run for wood,"—"we'll burn it down,"—"burn her up," &c., were followed by immediate action. There was to be no child's play now, I saw ; and, indeed, found myself as exoited as the rest, and justifying the most ferocious extremes of retaliation. In the midst of the curses and clamors, the indomitable Fitz shouted out to some of the tallow-coated sufferers who were most obstreperous—

"Boys, keep cool—don't catch afire, you *wick*-ed fellows ; you had better keep yer light under a bushel to-night—we shan't need it, I judge."

"Yes, but we shall have a light now—like a city set upon a hill—wont we?" said the Bravo, laughing, while he struck fire with his flint and steel. There was something very ghastly in this profane wit, but it was sufficiently in keeping with the men and the occasion. Hays, who had been severely scalded, and between the pain and the shame was more excited than he had ever been known to become before, now went hurrying to and fro to organize the measures for instant attack. Fragments of dried wood and arms-full of moss were brought from the forest close at hand,

and piled up against the gate, while the few little huts we have spoken of as on the outside of the picketing which faced the river, were stripped of everything they contained that was inflammable. Boards, beds, cotton garments, &c., were thrown upon the heap, in the coolest disregard of the wailings of their unoffending owners.

With the greatest difficulty I managed to prevent them from dragging the bed from under the poor wounded Mexican—concerning my interest in whom I have detailed before. Women and children were fluttering around the scene, making most dismal complainings. As these formidable preparations were now completed, we had time to perceive that everything had become still again in the Rancho.

“Fire it up, boys! fire it up! Where’s any fire?”

These hoarse words from the Colonel sounded startlingly distinct in the sudden pause.

“Here it is!” said the Bravo, coming forward with a bundle of blazing moss in his hand.

“Look sharp, Bravo,” Bill sang out from behind. “The old hell-cat’s on hand above there!”

I looked quickly around. Bill was standing some distance in the rear, on a knoll that commanded a better view of the top of the picketing, and held old Sue in such a position as would enable him to fire at the first movement he saw. At the same moment a low titter was heard from above.

“That’s she!” gnashed the Colonel, as he drew his six-shooter up to his face. We all did the same with our guns. “Shoot a little finger if you see it, boys!”

The reckless Bravo, who had not hesitated an instant, or even looked up, was kneeling beside the pile applying the fire, when suddenly three or four figures were juttèd above the top profile of the picket—to be fired at by our whole platoon—and disappear as quickly. Before we had time to wink our eyes, a number of figures appeared again, returned our fire, and sent down a new shower of—*hot water* this time—upon the Bravo. (They were too cunning to try the inflammable tallow now.) The Colonel’s repeater was fired instantly again, and the shriek which followed the second disappearance showed that it had been with effect. “No

stuffed shirts that time, I reckon!" he chuckled, as he shifted the chambers of his piece. They had drawn our whole fire into shams.

"He! he!" shouted Bill, as he loaded. "Boys, she's made a tarnal pack o' pea-green fools of us. Half er ye hold fire next time! Listen how the witch-critter sniggers at us!"

Sure enough, that pleasant screech was sounding in a sort of spasmodic ecstasy behind the picketing. The Bravo, who was mutely writhing in the "shirt of Nessus," which had been so unceremoniously bestowed upon him, sprang to the small fire he had kindled to light the moss by, and which was still burning feebly, and gathering the scattered fragments in his naked fingers proceeded to kindle the pile anew. They tried the manœuvre of the shams again, but with less success, for only two shots were wasted at them. The skirmish now commenced in earnest. The shifting and significant pantomime of from eighty to a hundred heads and shoulders appearing here and there along the dim outline of the picketing, to fire an old escopet at us quickly and disappear, gave us sufficient employment. Our rapid and dexterous firing covered the Bravo effectually; for no one on the picket dared to expose his body by leaning forward far enough to bring a gun to bear upon him so close below. They could only spring up for a second, fire without aim, and dip down again; and alert as they were, the sharp cry or the groan which sometimes followed our shots told that they were suffering.

We kept them by the dread of our superior marksmanship so effectually under cover, that though they wasted bad powder enough, and many of us were standing openly exposed, their fire did us little mischief. A shower of twigs cut down by some erratic ball would now and then fall over us, or the dust would be knocked up at our feet. But when the Bravo had succeeded in setting fire to the heap, and the flames began to mount up strongly, matters became more serious. It seemed to me that the whole population of the Rancho made its appearance at once in solid line of heads, and a perfect storm of curses, missiles, and bullets were sent after his retreat. Quite severely wounded, he took refuge in the sheep-pen, upon which we found ourselves compelled to fall back for protection, with the loss of two men

and several wounded. This was getting to be fierce work. Even Fitz forgot to be witty !

"Boys, don't scatter yer fire," shouted the Colonel ; "thin 'em from over the gate !"

One platoon was sufficient to vacate the place for the moment ; but before we were ready to fire again they had thrown over more water, and the fire appeared to be quite extinguished. We could hear the shrill screams of the old Señora, directing, threatening, and driving her cowardly people up to the defence. She was perfectly aroused and desperate. We saw that her ferocious cunning was about to defeat us. She had inspired her imbecile people, in spite of themselves, with something of her own spirit ; and as the volume of steam and smoke from the smouldering fire rolled up, there was a general burst of derision and defiance, above which her own wiry treble shrilled in fitting accord. With all our boundless contempt for the Mexicans, we were beginning to find out that destroying a Rancho with over three hundred people inside of it, and a high strong picketing around it, was no light undertaking even for something less than a dozen Texans.

Castro and his warriors—who, though they had no guns, might have been of some assistance to us in causing a diversion—had been assigned, before the attack commenced, their positions at wide intervals around the whole Rancho, with orders not to budge, whatever might happen, until their chief had been sent for, so that we were deprived of their agency.

In his stolid faithfulness, Castro would not have moved after such a command from Hays, without his permission, if the Rancho had been blown sky-high and we all along with it. The business of his warriors was to watch for Agatone and to intercept his escape ; and so much had the chief accustomed them to the despotism of literal obedience that, unless a command had come through him, personally, or through some understood sign or watchword, they would have died in their tracks rather than have stirred for any other duty than that he had appointed.

That a renewal of the attack upon the gate, and of the effort to rekindle the fire, would be something worse than madness nearly all felt but the Colonel. It seemed to be utterly impossible for him to realize that, as we had lost two men, and had several nearly dis-

abled in the first attack, we should not be able to accomplish twice as much with half the number in a second onset, when the whole population of the Rancho had been roused to desperation in the defence of their hearth-stones. Entirely discomfited, we were crouched behind the low fence of the sheep-pen, to consult as to the steps next to be taken. The Colonel was sufficiently raving and unreasonable—for quite characteristically he swore that we might, could, and would, get into the Rancho somehow, at any rate—that enter it we *should*, even if we used our craniums for battering-rams, and were tilted in “head foremost.” Several of the men were likewise of opinion that, after such *scalding* indignities, TEXANS would not only be able to demolish a contemptible Rancho at a blow, but that even if the “Planetary plague” of baleful Mars “hung i’ the sick air,” by vengeful Jove! had been the offender, they would scale its high place and pluck its red hair, to be trampled in the mire of their scorn. Such direful and terrific resolves were sufficiently in keeping with the extravagant heroics of this Frontier life.

The only possible question left open for discussion was the *practicability* of all this. The tame and cowardly sentiment that everything they chose to purpose might not be accomplished, was not to be endured in the utterance. These men had become so accustomed to bearing down everything before them, that absolutely nothing appeared to them impossible; and I lost all the ground I had gained in their confidence, when I attempted to make them see the utter absurdity of any further attempts upon the Rancho. The firing on both sides had ceased.

A very excited discussion was angrily proceeding as to the course proper to be taken now, when it was all at once discovered that Bill Johnson was no longer in our midst. What had become of him at such a crisis, when we needed every energy of every member of the party who had been left alive?

“Bill knows what he is about,” said Hays; “we shall hear from him presently.”

Sure enough; within two minutes the wild war-whoop of the Lipans was sounded from the other side of the Rancho, and following it instantly, a spire of flame shot up from the same

quarter towards the zenith, illuminating the whole region with great distinctness. The discomfited Rangers sprang to their feet, and their answering yell had, in its electric burst, a savagery that reminded me of famished wild beasts replying to the call of their shagged brethren to a feast of blood. A diversion had been suddenly made by Bill and Castro.

The wary trapper had perceived in time that all was lost in front, and had glided away—fortified with a watchword from Hays—to bring our Indian auxiliaries into action. The rush which instantly followed on our part, and the scattering of the heads which had been linked in that continuous line along the top of the picket, caused a magical change in the aspect of affairs.

This new attack—so unexpected and from the opposite quarter—of course confounded the old Señora, and obliged her to separate her defensive force. The Bravo, though wounded in such a manner as would have entirely annihilated the combative propensity in any other man, instantly staggered towards the pile at the gate. He had only sufficient strength to reach it, and throwing himself upon the ground—or falling upon it—he leaned on his elbow, and in a few moments had kindled the fire anew with the help of his flint and steel.

Our party threw in a close volley to cover this cool exhibition of desperation, and though now reduced to five or six guns, it had the effect of clearing the wall entirely. It was evident the Mexicans were panic-stricken for the time—how long this might last we did not lose an instant in philosophizing about. The others of those who had been hurt seemed, like the Bravo, to have forgotten that anything had happened to them, and were quite as alert with the ramrod and trigger as the most active of us.

I have quite a confused recollection of the occurrences which followed for some half-hour after this; indeed, they were too exciting, too hurried in my confused memory, for me to reproduce them at all effectively. I can only recall here and there a fragmentary incident, which may assist others in apprehending what were the consequences of the darkened and frantic action of the struggle which followed.

I find myself now—looking back from the condition of a calmer existence—surprised, beyond expression, that my individuality

and consciousness could have been so entirely overwhelmed in this heady tumult. I remember the vindictive, exulting expression of the raging Colonel's voice, when he said, with a strange laugh, "Ha, ha! we've got 'em at last, boys!—come on."

Before he said this, he had been silently tugging at one of the heaviest picket-posts of the sheep-pen, and, having loosened it, and swung it upon his broad shoulders, he then led the way towards the now undefended gate. Though the fire the Bravo had kindled was beginning to burn vigorously, I recollect that, in entire disregard of its heat, he projected himself through the midst of it and threw the whole weight of his own immense strength, along with the battering-ram he had thus extemporized, against the gate.

The man's strength was so preternaturalized by the concentration of his fury, that though the gate was massive and strong, we heard the planks crash, as it burst its way through, while he fell from the rebound upon the burning pile, utterly helpless, and lay there as if he had been shot. Several of us sprang forward, and dragged him out of his perilous predicament by the heels. He had nearly made a Hindoo sacrifice of himself, upon the altar of his own headlong ferocity. The fire rushed through the fracture he had caused, and in an instant the timbers of the gate were blazing with a fierceness which scattered the crowd that had rallied above in the effort to extinguish it.

Now the scene was demoniac: the frantic wail of the despairing Mexicans who saw that all was lost, and feared they were to be burned up alive; their ill-directed defence and grotesque gestures, as they hurled into the air leaden and every other kind of projectiles; the lurid illumination of the two fires; the rapid movements and fierce exulting cries of our men, constituted an expressive *epitome* of the fiery tumult of a siege. I remember that the gate burnt out with such singular rapidity, that it almost seemed to have been made of paper, and through the red opening we could see the square of the open court, filled with the confused and swaying tumult of the population, maddened with panic, and utterly incapable of self-defence.

There was a momentary glimpse of the presiding genius of this infernal saturnalia, in the form of the old Señora, which presented

itself for an instant in the intense light of the opening. Her squatty figure was quickened with the action of a hateful life, which the years seemed only to have intensified ; she was but half-clothed, and was tossing her skinny arms into the air ; her coarse, stiff, greyish hair, wild about her shoulders, while her coppery face looked like a seamy blotch of crumpled parchment, out of which two round coals were burning, white with fierceness. I shall never forget the wizard and supernatural aspect her momentary appearance gave to the whole scene. The hate and defiance of that look seemed to have a galvanic effect upon the Colonel, who instantly rushed over the burning heaps and through the opening around which the flames were licking, calling upon us to follow. This, of course, we did.

The Mexicans made a feeble attempt to drive us back, but the raging aspect of the Colonel, and the terror his name carried with it, filled them with such a hopeless panic, that before we had time to strike two blows, men, women, and children, with yells of mortal fright, were rushing pell-mell on every side—some towards the burning gate through which we came—others into the doors of the low huts ranged around the four sides of the court.

All but the Colonel and one or two of the scalded men, ceased to strike after the resistance had ceased. Hays and myself induced the two men to hold their hands, but could do nothing with the Colonel, who was perfectly mad and blind to everything but the one purpose of finding Agatone and the old Señora, and hewed away at all, of whatever sex and age, who chanced to impede his search. The men went down on their knees before him, clamoring for mercy, and without pausing to regard them an instant, he would strike them to the ground with his foot, the handle of his knife, or the blade of it, just as it happened. He would rush into one of the low huts, where men, women, and children were piled upon each other in a corner, each trying to get to the bottom, and hauling them out by the hair or the heels, he would scatter them, like so many billets of wood, to and fro, over the room, until he had examined every face, to see if those he hated were among them.

In this search, he was actively assisted by the other members of

the party, and I cannot say with any particular regard to a gentle etiquette on the part of any one of us. The Mexicans were perfectly passive, and abjectly submitted to being tumbled about at our pleasure. But Agatone and the old Señora were nowhere to be found, and fears that they had escaped were beginning to be spoken. The very idea of such a thing seemed to inspire the Colonel with a sort of ubiquity of energy; every corner, hole, and cranny of the Rancho was dived into by him, in an astonishingly short time; everything that a good-sized mouse, even, could have hid beneath, was turned over, yet neither of the objects of his affectionate interest was to be found.

The fires, in the meantime, were rapidly subsiding of themselves, for it is extremely difficult to burn down one of these Ranchos. The picket is of heavy mesquit timber, the most difficult wood to burn in the world; the huts inside are built of "dobies" (clumsy bricks dried in the sun), and are thatched with the bulrushes of the salt-swamps of the country; and they are nearly as difficult to set on fire as the "dobies;" so that when the more inflammable timbers of the gate had burned out, the flames and light went gradually down, leaving us in comparative darkness. The fire, Bill and the Lipans had kindled, was still throwing up a fitful light, though, for the reasons given, it spread but little. We had all, but the Colonel, given up the search in despair, and were standing in a group around a small fire, which is kept burning, night and day, beneath a huge kettle of tallow or lard, which is always boiling over it, and from the capacious depths of which the singular shower we had been first saluted with, had come. The men, in spite of the excitement, fatigues, and injuries contingent upon the late scenes, were joking each other upon what had occurred, and passing around certain bottles which their investigations had brought to light.

The disappointment of Bill and the Colonel—since all the toil and loss we had endured seemed to have amounted to nothing, after the escape of their two enemies—was just being laughed at by Fitz, when the Colonel thrust his head from the door of one of the huts on the side next the river, and shouting eagerly—"Here, boys—I've found their hole—we'll catch 'em yet"—dis-

appeared within it quickly. We all rushed into the hut. We found him, with a lamp in his hand, stooping at a square hole in the back part of the room, which seemed as if it had been cut through the picketing, near the bottom. It had been concealed by a bed and some skins, which he had dragged away.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled, in an under tone of ecstasy, "we've got 'em—here's the burrow, boys!" and holding the lamp before him, entered the dark passage without hesitation. It admitted him, stooping slightly. We crowded after him with a reckless curiosity, to see what this might lead to. No obstruction presented itself, and we soon found ourselves standing in one of those Dutch oven-like huts we have mentioned, as dug into the bank of the river, on the outside of the picket. The wounded Mexican was starting up, with terror in his face, from the bed I had rescued for him. Frightened as he was, he was too weak to rise, and fell back. The Colonel sprang at him, and shaking him furiously by the arm, demanded, in the Mexican language, whether the Señora and Agatone had passed out through this way.

The man muttered some confused answer, while we rushed forward, and lifting the beef's hide which served for a door, passed out into the open air, and stood upon the brink of the steep bank of the river. The moon was quite bright, and the fires still gave some illumination. We have observed that the river was narrow. The first objects which met our eyes were two human figures, just in the act of shaking the water from their garments as they stepped rapidly across the narrow interval where the light fell, between the edge of the water and the deep gloom of the forest. "There they are!" said some one, quickly. This was followed by the discharge of several pieces from our party, but too late. The figures were lost beneath the shadows of the forest. That shrill taunting laugh was the reply, and at the same moment the Colonel, brushing past us, threw himself with a horrid blasphemy upon his lips, headlong down the steep bank into the water. A deep mouthed-whoop from Bill, higher up the river, told that his sharp vision had made the same discovery; and in a little while we could see the river dark with black objects, which proved to be the heads of the Lipans, who were swimming across in the pursuit.

The sounds of pursuit soon died away, and as none of us felt like taking quite so steep a plunge-bath as the Colonel's gratuitously, and as it appeared to us there were more than enough already in the chase to accomplish its objects, we turned quietly back and passed into the Rancho again. We very unhesitatingly laid it under contribution for what amount of edibles and drinkables were found necessary, or rather, what we could get our hands upon. It was now nearly day. We were all greatly exhausted; the wounded men dreadfully so. No news was likely to come from the chase very soon, and repose was to be had at any risk. We accordingly took possession of the largest room we could find, and barricading the entrances thereto, placed a sentinel on duty, and threw our weary bones upon skin pallets.

We slept, sentinel and all, until late in the morning, when we were suddenly roused by a tremendous thumping and clatter from without. Springing to my feet, I saw that our sentinel, half asleep, had undone the fastenings, and the Colonel, haggard with exhaustion, and begrimed with dirt and wet, staggered into the room, and threw himself upon the floor. The huge form of Bill Johnson stalked in after him, dripping with water indeed, but with his iron-face looking as fresh and kindly as if he had just waked up, on some calm May-morning, from a pleasant sleep.

"Well, old boy, what's what?" drawled out Fitz, who had half risen, and now sank down lazily upon his elbow. "You did it up clean there in the bush, I suppose?"

"Clean!" said Bill, as he set old Sue down in a corner with careful tenderness. "I aint mighty clean, outen the mud and stink er that river. But the way that wrinkly-faced hell-cat done us out clean 's nothing to nobody! Them two 'll do for screamers, any dark night! We never seen a glimpse uv 'em after they got under them black woods, till we seed 'em safe enough in Navarro's Rancho, six miles over yonder, you know!"

"How *could* you have let 'em get away this time, Bill?"

"I don't mind er horse runnin, when I knows a horse is in the case, and can see which way he'll take. How could anybody whar want too thick with Old Scratch, like she, have know'd they had a horse waitin' in the bush? I thunk she'd tuck to her broomstick till the crack o' day. Then I seed ther horse-trail, and

followed it till we all comed to the Rancho, and thar she war, on top er the picket, shakin' her scraggy claws at us and screechin. Kern let drive at her, but he war too mad, it didn't do! She's *some*, boys! Bill Johnson says it! Whar's sumphen to drink, boys?"

Seizing a bottle, he half emptied its contents at a single draught, and passed it to the Colonel, who silently held up his hand for it.

The strange old witch and her worthy and worshipful nephew had thoroughly outdone and baffled us after all! Texans, the cream of frontier trailers, warriors, and desperadoes, outwitted—defeated by an old woman!!

We left the Rancho—without doing it or its people any further injury—that evening, and returned to the Colonel's. Before sundown an express came from Bexar, recalling Hays and his Rangers to their post immediately. The news of a large body of Mexican troops from the Rio Grande, actually on their way to destroy the place, was sufficient to rouse these dauntless and adventurous men. They shook off their fatigue, and we were soon in the saddle. No remonstrance could induce the Colonel to accompany us. He had scarcely spoken since the scene we have last described—sullen and bowed, all his ferocious animality seemed to have deserted him. We endeavored to make him see that his resolve to remain in such a neighborhood alone, and surrounded by an infuriated swarm of enemies, would be to insure his own murder. He went moping about like one who felt the heavy shadows of his doom closing and weighing upon him. I looked back within a short distance. He was sitting on the stile-blocks of his Rancho—his head leaning on his arm, and his fingers mechanically playing with the lock of his favorite six-shooter. This was the last I ever saw of this violent man.

Having now brought my Mexican adventures to a close, and I hope gained the sympathy of my readers for my toils, and sufferings, and "moving incidents by flood and field," I hope still to win their kind attention to some adventures which occurred in a new field, fertile in all sorts of perils from all sorts of causes. With the present characters we shall have little more to do than to trace the end of their respective careers, which we will

do on a future occasion, merely remarking here, that should any of my readers visit the scenes of which I have spoken, they must not imagine that I have overwrought or too highly colored my descriptions, either of the country or inhabitants. The great influx of new settlers, bringing with them all their notions and some of the appliances of more refined life, have so changed both the character of the country and its localities, that, should I now go over the same ground, even I might be tempted to dispute its identity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MUSTANGS.

READER ! Were you ever in a Texian prairie ? Probably not. *I* have been ; and this was how it happened. I found myself one fine morning possessor of a Texas land-scrip—that is to say, a certificate of the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, in which it was stated that in consideration of the sum of one thousand dollars, duly paid and delivered by Mr. ——— into the hands of the cashier of the aforesaid company, he, the said ——— was become entitled to ten thousand acres of Texian land, to be selected by himself, or those he should appoint, under the sole condition of not infringing on the property or rights of the holders of previously given certificates.

Ten thousand acres of the finest land in the world, and under a heaven compared to which our southern sky, bright as it is, appears dull and foggy ! It was a tempting bait ; too good a one not to be caught at by many in those times of speculation ; and accordingly, our free and enlightened citizens bought and sold their millions of Texian acres just as readily as they did their thousands of towns and villages in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, and their tens of thousands of shares in banks and railways. It was a speculative fever, which has since, we may hope, been in some degree cured. At any rate, the remedies applied have been tolerably severe.

I had not escaped the contagion, and, having got the land on paper, I thought I should like to see it in dirty acres ; so, in company with a friend who had a similar venture, I embarked at

Baltimore on board the *Catcher* schooner, and, after a three weeks' voyage, arrived at Galveston Bay.

The grassy shores of this Bay, into which the river Brazos empties itself, rise so little above the surface of the water, to which they bear a strong resemblance in color, that it would be difficult to discover them, were it not for three stunted trees growing on the western extremity of a long lizard-shaped island that stretches nearly sixty miles across the bay, and conceals the mouth of the river. These trees are the only landmark for the mariner; and with their exception, not a single object—not a hill, a house, nor so much as a bush, relieves the level sameness of the island and adjacent continent.

After we had, with some difficulty, got on the inner side of the island, a pilot came on board and took charge of the vessel. The first thing he did was to run us on a sandbank, off which we got with no small labor, and by the united exertions of sailors and passengers, and at length entered the river. In our impatience to land, I and my friend left the schooner in a cockshell of a boat, which upset in the surge, and we found ourselves floundering in the water. Luckily it was not very deep, and we escaped with a thorough drenching.

When we had scrambled on shore, we gazed about us for some time before we could persuade ourselves that we were actually upon land. It was, without exception, the strangest coast we had ever seen, and there was scarcely a possibility of distinguishing the boundary between earth and water. The green grass grew down to the edge of the green sea, and there was only the streak of white foam left by the latter upon the former to serve as a line of demarcation. Before us was a plain, a hundred or more miles in extent, covered with long, fine grass, rolling in waves before each puff of the sea-breeze, with neither tree, nor house, nor hill, to vary the monotony of the surface. Ten or twelve miles towards the north and north-west, we distinguished some dark masses, which we afterwards discovered to be groups of trees; but to our eyes they looked exactly like islands in a green sea, and we subsequently learned that they were called islands by the people of the country. It would have been difficult to have given them a

more appropriate name, or one better describing their appearance.

Proceeding along the shore, we came to a blockhouse situated behind a small tongue of land projecting into the river, and decorated with the flag of the Mexican republic, waving in all its glory from the roof. At that period, this was the only building of which Galveston harbor could boast. It served as custom-house and as barracks for the garrison, also as the residence of the director of customs, and the civil and military intendant, as headquarters of the officer commanding, and, moreover, as hotel and wine and spirit store. Alongside the board, on which was depicted a sort of hieroglyphic, intended for the Mexican eagle, hung a bottle doing duty as a sign, and the republican banner threw its protecting shadow over the announcement of—"Brandy, Whiskey, and accommodation for Man and Beast."

As we approached the house, we saw the whole garrison assembled before the door. It consisted of a dozen dwarfish, spindle-shanked Mexican soldiers, none of them so big or half so strong as American boys of fifteen, and whom I would have backed a single Kentucky woodsman, armed with a riding-whip, to have driven to the four winds of heaven. These heroes all sported tremendous beards, whiskers and mustaches, and had a habit of knitting their brows, in the endeavor, as we supposed, to look fierce and formidable. They were crowding round a table of rough planks, and playing a game of cards, in which they were so deeply engrossed that they took no notice of our approach. Their officer however, came out of the house to meet us.

Captain Cotton, formerly editor of the *Mexican Gazette*, now civil and military commandant at Galveston, customs-director, harbor-master, and tavern-keeper, and a Yankee to boot, seemed to trouble himself very little about his various dignities and titles. He produced some capital French and Spanish wine, which, it is to be presumed, he got duty free, and welcomed us to Texas. We were presently joined by some of our fellow-passengers, who seemed as bewildered as we had been at the billiard-table appearance of the country. Indeed the place looked so desolate and uninviting, that there was little inducement to remain on *terra*

firma, and it was with a feeling of relief that we once more found ourselves on board the schooner.

We took three days to sail up the river Brazos to the town of Brazoria, a distance of thirty miles. On the first day nothing but meadow land was visible on either side of us; but, on the second, the monotonous grass-covered surface was varied by islands of trees, and, about twenty miles from the mouth of the river, we passed through a forest of sycamores, and saw several herds of deer and flocks of wild turkeys. At length we reached Brazoria, which at the time I speak of, namely, in the year 1832, was an important city—for Texas, that is to say—consisting of upwards of thirty houses, three of which were of brick, three of planks, and the remainder of logs. All the inhabitants were Americans, and the streets arranged in American fashion, in straight lines and at right angles. The only objection to the place was, that in the wet season it was all under water; but the Brazorians overlooked this little inconvenience, in consideration of the inexhaustible fruitfulness of the soil. It was the beginning of March when we arrived, and yet there was already an abundance of new potatoes, beans, peas, and artichokes, all of the finest sorts, and most delicious flavor.

At Brazoria, my friend and myself had the satisfaction of learning that our land-certificates, for which we had each paid a thousand dollars, were worth exactly nothing—just so much waste paper, in short—unless we chose to conform to a condition to which our worthy friends, the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, had never made the smallest allusion.

It appeared that in the year 1824, the Mexican Congress had passed an act for the encouragement of emigration from the United States to Texas. In consequence of this act, an agreement was entered into with contractors, or *empresarios*, as they call them in Mexico, who had bound themselves to bring a certain number of settlers into Texas within a given time, and without any expense to the Mexican government. On the other hand the Mexican government had engaged to furnish land to these emigrants at the rate of five square leagues to every hundred families; but to this agreement one condition was attached, and it was that all settlers

should become Roman Catholics. Failing this, the validity of their claims to the land was not recognized, and they were liable to be turned out any day at the point of the bayonet.

This information threw us into no small perplexity. It was clear that we had been duped, completely bubbled, by the rascally Land Company ; that, as heretics, the Mexican government would have nothing to say to us ; and that, unless we chose to become converts to the Romish Church, we might whistle for our acres, and light our pipes with the certificate. Our Yankee friends at Brazoria, however, laughed at our dilemma, and told us that we were only in the same plight as hundreds of our countrymen, who had come to Texas in total ignorance of this condition, but who had not the less taken possession of their land, and settled there ; that they themselves were among the number, and that, although it was just as likely they would turn negroes as Roman Catholics, they had no idea of being turned out of their houses and plantations ; that, at any rate, if the Mexicans tried it, they had their rifles with them, and should be apt, they reckoned, to burn powder before they allowed themselves to be kicked off such an almighty fine piece of soil. So, after awhile, we began to think, that as we had paid our money and come so far, we might do as others had done before us—occupy our land, and wait the course of events. The next day we each bought a horse or *mustang*, as they call them there, which animals were selling at Brazoria for next to nothing, and rode out into the prairie to look for a convenient spot to settle.

These mustangs are small horses, rarely above fourteen hands high, and are descended from the Spanish breed introduced by the original conquerors of the country. During the three centuries that have elapsed since the conquest of Mexico, they have increased and multiplied to an extraordinary extent, and are to be found in vast droves in the Texian prairies, although they are now beginning to become somewhat scarcer. They are taken with the *lasso*, concerning which instrument or weapon I will here say a word or two, notwithstanding that it has been often described.

The lasso is generally from twenty to thirty feet long, very

flexible, and composed of strips of twisted ox-hide. One end is fastened to the saddle, and the other, which forms a running noose, held in the hand of the hunter, who, thus equipped rides out into the prairie. When he discovers a troop of wild horses, he manœuvres to get to windward of them, and then to approach as near as possible. If he is an experienced hand, the horses seldom or never escape him, and as soon as he finds himself within twenty or thirty feet of them, he throws the noose with unerring aim over the neck of the one he has selected for his prey. This done he turns his own horse sharp around, gives him the spur, and gallops away, dragging his unfortunate captive after him, breathless, and with his windpipe so compressed by the noose, that he is unable to make the smallest resistance, and after a few yards, falls headlong to the ground, and lies motionless and almost lifeless, sometimes indeed badly hurt and disabled. From this day forward, the horse which has been thus caught never forgets the lasso; the mere sight of it makes him tremble in every limb; and, however wild he may be, it is sufficient to show it to him, or lay it on his neck, to render him as tame and docile as a lamb.

The horse taken, next comes the breaking in, which is effected in a no less brutal manner than his capture. The eyes of the unfortunate animal are covered with a bandage, and a tremendous bit, a pound weight or more, clapped into his mouth; the horse-breaker puts on a pair of spurs six inches long, and with rowels like penknives, and jumping on his back, urges him to his very utmost speed. If the horse tries to rear or turns restive, one pull, and not a very hard one either, at the instrument of torture they call a bit, is sufficient to tear his mouth to shreds, and cause the blood to flow in streams. I have myself seen horses' teeth broken with these barbarous bits. The poor beast whinnies and groans with pain and terror; but there is no help for him; the spurs are at his flanks, and on he goes full gallop, till he is ready to sink with fatigue and exhaustion. He then has a quarter of an hour's rest allowed him; but scarcely does he begin to recover breath, which has been ridden and spurred out of his body, when he is again mounted, and has to go through the same violent process as before. If he breaks down during this rude trial, he is

either knocked on the head or driven away as useless; but if he holds out, he is marked with a hot iron, and left to graze on the prairie. Henceforward, there is no particular difficulty in catching him when wanted; the wildness of the horse is completely punished out of him, but for it is substituted the most confirmed vice and malice that it is possible to conceive. These mustangs are unquestionably the most deceitful and spiteful of all the equine race. They seem to be perpetually looking out for an opportunity of playing their master a trick; and very soon after I got possession of mine, I was nearly paying for him in a way that I had certainly not calculated upon.

We were going to Bolivar, and had to cross the river Brazos. I was the last but one to get into the boat, and was leading my horse carelessly by the bridle. Just as I was about to step in, a sudden jerk, and a cry of "mind your beast!" made me jump on one side, and luckily was it that I did so. My mustang had suddenly sprung back, reared up, and then thrown himself forward upon me with such force and fury, that, as I got out of his way, his fore feet went completely through the bottom of the boat. I never in my life saw an animal in such a paroxysm of rage. He curled up his lips till his whole range of teeth was visible, his eyes literally shot fire, while the foam flew from his mouth, and he gave a wild, screaming neigh that had something quite diabolical in its sound. I was standing perfectly thunderstruck at this scene, when one of the party took a lasso and very quietly laid it over the animal's neck. The effect was really magical. With closed mouth, drooping ears, and head low, there stood the mustang, as meek and docile as any old jackass. The change was so sudden and comical, that we all burst out laughing; although, when I came to reflect on the danger I had run, it required all my love of horses to prevent me from shooting the brute upon the spot.

Mounted upon this ticklish steed, and in company with my friend, I made various excursions to Bolivar, Marion, Columbia, Anahuac, incipient cities consisting of from five to twenty houses. We also visited numerous plantations and clearings, to the owners of some of which we were known, or had messages of introduction; but either with or without such recommendations, we always found

a hearty welcome and hospitable reception, and it was rare that we were allowed to pay for our entertainment.

We arrived one day at a clearing, which lay a few miles off the way from Harrisburg to San Felipe de Austin, and belonged to a Mr. Neal. He had been three years in the country, occupying himself with the breeding of cattle, which is unquestionably the most agreeable, as well as profitable, occupation that can be followed in Texas. He had between seven and eight hundred head of cattle, and from fifty to sixty horses, all mustangs. His plantation, like nearly all the plantations in Texas at that time, was as yet in a very rough state; and his house, although roomy and comfortable enough inside, was built of unhewn tree-trunks, in true backwoodsman style. It was situated on the border of one of the islands, or groups of trees, and stood between two gigantic sycamores, which sheltered it from the sun and wind. In front, and as far as could be seen, lay the prairie, covered with its waving grass and many-colored flowers; behind the dwelling arose a cluster of forest trees in all their primeval majesty, laced and bound together by an infinity of wild vines, which shot their tendrils and clinging branches hundreds of feet upwards to the very top of the trees, embracing and covering the whole island with a green network, and converting it into an immense bower of vine leaves, which would have been no unsuitable abode for Bacchus and his train.

These islands are one of the most enchanting features of Texian scenery. Of infinite variety and beauty of form, and unrivalled in the growth and magnitude of the trees that compose them, they are to be found of all shapes—circular, parallelograms, hexagons, octagons—some again twisting and winding like dark-green snakes over the brighter surface of the prairie. In no park or artificially laid out grounds, would it be possible to find anything equalling these natural shrubberies in beauty and symmetry. In the morning and evening especially, when surrounded by a sort of veil of light-greyish mist, and with the horizontal beams of the rising or setting sun gleaming through them, they offer pictures which it is impossible to get weary of admiring.

Mr. Neal was a jovial Kentuckian, and he received us with

the greatest hospitality, only asking in return all the news we could give him from the States. It is difficult to imagine, without having witnessed it, the feverish eagerness and curiosity with which all intelligence from their native country is sought after and listened to by these dwellers in the desert. Men, women, and children, crowded round us; and though we had arrived in the afternoon, it was near sunrise before we could escape from the inquiries by which we were overwhelmed, and retire to the beds that had been prepared for us.

I had not slept very long, when I was roused by our worthy host. He was going out to catch twenty or thirty oxen, which were wanted for the market at New Orleans. As the kind of chase which takes place after these animals is very interesting, and rarely dangerous, we willingly accepted the invitation to accompany him, and having dressed and breakfasted in all haste, got upon our mustangs and rode off into the prairie.

The party was half a dozen strong, consisting of Mr. Neal, my friend and myself, and three negroes. What we had to do, was to drive the cattle, which were grazing on the prairie in herds of from thirty to fifty head, to the house, and then those which were selected for the market were to be taken with the lasso and sent off to Brazoria.

After riding four or five miles, we came in sight of a drove of splendid animals, standing very high, and of most symmetrical form. The horns of these cattle are of unusual length, and, in the distance, have more the appearance of stags' antlers than bulls' horns. We approached the herd first to within a quarter of a mile. They remained very quiet. We rode round them, and in like manner got in rear of a second and third drove, and then began to spread out, so as to form a half circle, and drive the cattle towards the house.

Hitherto my mustang had behaved exceedingly well, cantering freely along, and not attempting to play any tricks. I had scarcely, however, left the remainder of the party a couple of hundred yards, when the devil by which he was possessed began to wake up. The mustangs belonging to the plantation were grazing some three quarters of a mile off; and no sooner did my

beast catch sight of them, than he commenced practising every species of jump and leap that it is possible for a horse to execute, and many of a nature so extraordinary, that I should have thought no brute that ever went on four legs would have been able to accomplish them. He shied, reared, pranced, leaped forwards, backwards, and sideways; in short, played such infernal pranks, that, although a practised rider, I found it no easy matter to keep my seat. I began heartily to regret that I had brought no lasso with me, (which would have tamed him at once.) and that, contrary to Mr. Neal's advice, I had put on my American bit instead of a Mexican one. Without these auxiliaries, all my horsemanship was useless. The brute galloped like a mad creature some five hundred yards, caring nothing for my efforts to stop him; and then, finding himself close to the troop of mustangs, he stopped suddenly short, threw his head between his fore-legs, and his hind feet into the air, with such vicious violence, that I was pitched clean out of the saddle. Before I well knew where I was, I had the satisfaction of seeing him put his fore-feet on the bridle, pull bit and bridoon out of his mouth, and then, with a neigh of exultation, spring into the midst of the herd of mustangs.

I got up out of the long grass in a towering passion. One of the negroes who was nearest to me came galloping to my assistance, and begged me to let the beast run for awhile, and that when Anthony, the huntsman, came, he would soon catch him. I was too angry to listen to reason, and I ordered him to get off his horse, and let me mount. The black begged and prayed of me not to ride after the brute; and Mr. Neal, who was some distance off, shouted to me, as loud as he could, for Heaven's sake to stop—that I did not know what it was to chase a wild horse in a Texian Prairie, and that I must not fancy myself in the meadows of Louisiana or Florida. I paid no attention to all this—I was in too great a rage at the trick the beast had played me, and, jumping on the negro's horse, I galloped away like mad.

My rebellious steed was grazing quietly with his companions, and he allowed me to come within a couple of hundred paces of him; but just as I had prepared the lasso, which was fastened to

the negro's saddle-bow, he gave a start, galloped off some distance further, and I after him. Again he made a pause, and munched a mouthful of grass—then off again for another half mile. This time I had great hopes of catching him, for he let me come within a hundred yards; but, just as I was creeping up to him, away he went with one of his shrill neighs. When I galloped fast, he went faster; when I rode slowly, he slackened his pace. At least ten times did he let me approach him within a couple of hundred yards, with little or no prospect of getting hold of him. It was certainly high time to desist from such a mad chase, but I never dreamed of doing so; and indeed the longer it lasted, the more obstinate I got. I rode on after the beast, who kept letting me come nearer and nearer, and then darted off again with his loud laughing neigh. It was this infernal neigh that made me so savage—there was something so spiteful and triumphant in it, as though the animal knew he was making a fool of me, and exulted in so doing. At last, however, I got so sick of my horse-hunt that I determined to make a last trial; and, if that failed, to turn back. The run-away had stopped near one of the islands of trees, and was grazing close to its edge. I thought that if I were to creep round to the other side of the island, and then steal across it, through the trees, I should be able to throw the lasso over his head, or, at any rate, to drive him back to the house. This plan I put in execution—rode round the island, then through it, lasso in hand, and as softly as if I had been riding over eggs. To my consternation, however, on arriving at the edge of the trees, and at the exact spot where, only a few minutes before, I had seen the mustang grazing, no signs of him were to be perceived. I made the circuit of the island, but in vain—the animal had disappeared. With a hearty curse, I put spurs to my horse, and started off to ride back to the plantation.

Neither the plantation, the cattle, nor my companions, were visible, it is true: but this gave me no uneasiness. I felt sure that I knew the direction in which I had come, and that the island I had just left was one which was visible from the house, while all around me were such numerous tracks of horses, that

the possibility of my having lost my way never occurred to me, and I rode on quite unconcernedly.

After riding for about an hour, however, I began to find the time rather long. I looked at my watch. It was past one o'clock. We had started at nine, and, allowing an hour and a half to have been spent in finding the cattle, I had passed nearly three hours in my wild and unsuccessful hunt. I began to think that I must have got further from the plantation than I had as yet supposed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRAIRIE SCAMPER.

It was towards the end of March, the day clear and warm, just like a May-day in the Southern States. The sun was now shining brightly out, but the early part of the morning had been somewhat foggy ; and, as I had only arrived at the plantation the day before, and had passed the whole afternoon and evening indoors, I had no opportunity of getting acquainted with the bearings of the house. This reflection began to make me rather uneasy, particularly when I remembered the entreaties of the negro, and the loud exhortations Mr. Neal addressed to me as I rode away. I said to myself, however, that I could not be more than ten or fifteen miles from the plantation, that I should soon come in sight of the herds of cattle, and that then there would be no difficulty in finding my way. But when I had ridden another hour without seeing the smallest sign either of man or beast, I got seriously uneasy. In my impatience, I abused poor Neal for not sending somebody to find me. His huntsman, I had heard, was gone to Anahuac, and would not be back for two or three days ; but he might have sent a couple of his lazy negroes. Or, if he had only fired a shot or two as a signal. I stopped and listened, in hopes of hearing the crack of a rifle. But the deepest stillness reigned around, scarcely the chirp of a bird was heard—all nature seemed to be taking the siesta. As far as the eye could reach was a waving sea of grass, here and there an island of trees, but not a trace of a human being. At last I thought I had made a discovery. The nearest clump of trees was undoubtedly the same which I had

pointed out to my companions soon after we had left the house. It bore a fantastical resemblance to a snake coiled up and about to dart upon its prey. About six or seven miles from the plantation we had passed it on our right hand, and if I now kept it upon my left, I could not fail to be going in a proper direction. So said, so done. I trotted on most perseveringly towards the point of the horizon where I felt certain the house must lie. One hour passed, then a second, then a third; every now and then I stopped and listened, but nothing was audible, not a shot nor a shout. But although I heard nothing, I saw something which gave me no great pleasure. In the direction in which we had ridden out, the grass was very abundant and the flowers scarce; whereas the part of the prairie in which I now found myself presented the appearance of a perfect flower garden, with scarcely a square foot of green to be seen. The most variegated carpet of flowers I ever beheld lay unrolled before me; red, yellow, violet, blue, every color was there; millions of the most magnificent prairie roses, tuberoses, asters, dahlias, and fifty other kinds of flowers. The finest artificial garden in the world would sink into insignificance when compared with this parterre of nature's own planting. My horse could hardly make his way through the wilderness of flowers, and I for a time remained lost in admiration of this scene of extraordinary beauty. The prairie in the distance looked as if clothed with rainbows, that waved to and fro over its surface.

But the difficulties and anxieties of my situation soon banished all other thoughts, and I rode on with perfect indifference through a scene, that, under other circumstances, would have captivated my entire attention. All the stories that I had heard of mishaps in these endless prairies, recurred in vivid coloring to my memory, not mere backwoodsman's legends, but facts well authenticated by persons of undoubted veracity who had warned me, before I came to Texas, against venturing without guide or compass into these dangerous wilds. Even men who had been long in the country, were often known to lose themselves, and to wander for days and weeks over these oceans of grass, where no hill or variety of surface offers a landmark to the traveller. In summer and autumn

such a position would have one danger the less, that is, there would be no risk of dying of hunger; for at those seasons the most delicious fruits, grapes, plums, peaches, and others, are to be found in abundance. But we were now in early spring, and although I saw numbers of peach and plum trees, they were only in blossom. Of game also there was plenty, both fur and feather, but I had no gun, and nothing appeared more probable than that I should die of hunger, although surrounded by food, and in one of the most fruitful countries in the world. This thought flashed suddenly across me, and for a moment my heart sunk within me as I first perceived the real danger of my position.

After a time, however, other ideas came to console me. I had been already four weeks in the country, and had ridden over a large slice of it in every direction, always through prairies, and I had never had any difficulty in finding my way. True, but then I had always had a compass and been in company. It was this sort of over-confidence and feeling of security, that had made me adventure so rashly, and spite of all warning, in pursuit of the mustang. I had not waited to reflect, that a little more than four weeks' experience was necessary to make one acquainted with the bearings of a district three times as big as New York State. Still I thought it impossible that I should have got so far out of the right track as not to be able to find the house before nightfall, which was now, however, rapidly approaching. Indeed, the first shade of evening, strange as it may seem, gave this persuasion increased strength. Home-bred and gently nurtured as I was, my life before coming to Texas had been by no means one of adventure, and I was so used to sleep with a roof over my head, that when I saw it getting dusk I felt certain I could not be far from the house. The idea fixed itself so strongly in my mind, that I involuntarily spurred my mustang, and trotted on, peering out through the fast-gathering gloom, in expectation of seeing a light. Several times I fancied I heard the barking of the dogs, the cattle lowing, or the merry laugh of the children.

"Hurrah! there is the house at last—I see the lights in the parlor windows."

I urged my horse on, but when I came near the house, it proved

to be an island of trees. What I had taken for candles were fire flies, that now issued in swarms from out of the darkness of the islands, and spread themselves over the prairie, darting about in every direction, their small blue flames literally lighting up the plain, and making it appear as if I were surrounded by a wall of Bengal fire. It is impossible to conceive anything more bewildering than such a ride as mine, on a warm March night, through the interminable never-varying prairie. Overhead the deep blue firmament, with its hosts of bright stars; at my feet, and all around, an ocean of magical light, myriads of fire-flies floating upon the soft still air. To me it was like a scene of enchantment. I could distinguish every blade of grass, every flower, each leaf on the trees, but all in a strange unnatural sort of light, and in altered colors. Tuberoses and asters, prairie roses and geraniums, dahlias and vine branches, began to wave and move, to range themselves in ranks and rows. The whole vegetable world around me seemed to dance, as the swarms of living lights passed over it.

Suddenly out of the sea of fire sounded a loud and long-drawn note. I stopped, listened, and gazed around me. It was not repeated, and I rode on. Again the same sound, but this time the cadence was sad and plaintive. Again I made a halt and listened. It was repeated a third time in a yet more melancholy tone, and I recognized it as the cry of a whip-poor-will. Presently it was answered from a neighboring island by a Katydid. My heart leaped for joy at hearing the note of this bird, the native minstrel of my own dear fatherland. In an instant the house where I was born stood before the eyesight of my imagination. There were the negro huts, the garden, the plantation, everything exactly as I had left it. So powerful was the illusion, that I gave my horse the spur, persuaded that my father's house lay before me. The island, too, I took for the grove that surrounded our house. On reaching its border, I literally dismounted, and shouted out for Charon Tommy. There was a stream running through our plantation, which, for nine months out of the twelve, was only passable by means of a ferry, and the old negro who officiated as ferryman was indebted to me for the above classical cognomen. I believe I called twice, nay, three times, but no Charon Tommy answered;

and I awoke as from a pleasant dream, somewhat ashamed of the length to which my excited imagination had hurried me.

I now felt so weary and exhausted, so hungry and thirsty, and withal, my mind was so anxious and harassed by my dangerous position, and the uncertainty how I should get out of it, that I was really incapable of going any further. I felt quite bewildered, and stood for some time gazing before me, and scarcely even troubling myself to think. At length I mechanically drew my clasp-knife from my pocket, and set to work to dig a hole in the rich black soil of the prairie. Into this hole I put the knotted end of my lasso, and then pushing it down with my foot, as I had seen others do since I had been in Texas, I passed the noose over my mustang's neck, and left him to graze, while I myself lay down outside the circle which the lasso would enable him to describe. An odd manner, it may seem of tying up a horse; but the most convenient and natural one in a country where one may often find one's-self fifty miles from any house, and five-and-twenty from a tree or bush.

I found it no easy matter to sleep, for on all sides I heard the howling of wolves and jaguars, an unpleasant serenade at any time, but most of all so in the prairie, unarmed and defenceless as I was. My nerves, too, were all in commotion, and I felt so feverish that I do not know what I should have done, had I not fortunately remembered that I had my cigar-case and a roll of tobacco, real Virginia *dulcissimus*, in my pocket—invaluable treasures in my present situation, and which on this, as on many other occasions, did not fail to soothe and calm my agitated thoughts.

Luckily, too, being a tolerably confirmed smoker, I carried a flint and steel with me; for otherwise, although surrounded by lights, I should have been sadly at a loss for fire. A couple of Havanas did me an infinite deal of good, and after a while I sunk into the slumber of which I stood so much in need.

The day was hardly well broken when I awoke. The refreshing sleep I had enjoyed had given me new energy and courage. I felt hungry enough, to be sure, but light and cheerful, and I hastened to dig up the end of the lasso, and saddled my horse. I trusted that, though I had been condemned to wander over the

prairie the whole of the preceding day as a sort of punishment for my rashness, I should now have better luck, and having expiated my fault, be at length allowed to find my way. With this hope I mounted my mustang, and resumed my ride.

I passed several beautiful islands of pecan, plum, and peach trees. It is a peculiarity worthy of remark, that these islands are nearly always of one sort of tree. It is very rare to meet with one where there are two sorts. Like the beasts of the forest, that herd together according to their kind, so does this wild vegetation preserve it. One island will be entirely composed of live oaks, another of plum, and a third of pecan trees; the vine only is common to them all, and embraces them all alike with its slender but tenacious branches. I rode through several of these islands. They were perfectly free from bushes and brushwood, and carpeted with the most beautiful verdure it is possible to behold. I gazed at them in astonishment. It seemed incredible that nature, abandoned to herself, should preserve herself so beautifully clean and pure, and I involuntarily looked around me for some trace of the hand of man. But none was there. I saw nothing but herds of deer, that gazed wonderingly at me with their large clear eyes, and when I approached too near, galloped off in alarm. What would I not have given for an ounce of lead, a charge of powder, and a Kentucky rifle? Nevertheless, the mere sight of the beasts gladdened me, and raised my spirits. They were a sort of society. *Something of the same feeling seemed to be imparted to my horse, who bounded under me, and neighed merrily as he cantered along in the fresh spring morning.

I was now skirting the side of an island of trees of greater extent than most of those I had hitherto seen. On reaching the end of it, I suddenly came in sight of an object presenting so extraordinary an appearance as far to surpass any of the natural wonders I had as yet beheld, either in Texas or the United States.

At the distance of about two miles rose a colossal mass, in shape somewhat like a monumental mound or tumulus, and apparently of the brightest silver. As I came in view of it, the sun

was just covered by a passing cloud, from the lower edge of which the bright rays shot down obliquely upon this extraordinary phenomenon, lighting it up in the most brilliant manner. At one moment it looked like a huge silver cone; then took the appearance of an illuminated castle with pinnacles and towers, or the dome of some great cathedral; then of a gigantic elephant, covered with trappings, but always of solid silver, and indescribably magnificent. Had all the treasures of the earth been offered me to say what it was, I should have been unable to answer. Bewildered by my interminable wanderings in the prairie, and weakened by fatigue and hunger, a superstitious feeling for a moment came over me, and I half asked myself whether I had not reached some enchanted region, into which the evil spirit of the prairie was luring me to destruction by appearances of supernatural strangeness and beauty.

Banishing these wild imaginings, I rode on in the direction of this strange object; but it was only when I came within a very short distance, that I was able to distinguish its nature. It was a live oak of most stupendous dimensions, the very patriarch of the prairie, grown grey in the lapse of ages. Its lower limbs had shot out in a horizontal, or rather a downward-slanting direction; and, reaching nearly to the ground, formed a vast dome several hundred feet in diameter, and full a hundred and thirty feet high. It had no appearance of a tree, for neither trunk nor branches were visible. It seemed a mountain of whitish-green scales, fringed with long silvery moss, that hung like innumerable beards from every bough and twig. Nothing could better convey the idea of immense and incalculable age than the hoary beard and venerable appearance of this monarch of the woods. Spanish moss of a silvery grey covered the whole mass of wood and foliage, from the topmost bough down to the very ground; short near the top of the tree, but gradually increasing in length as it descended, until it hung like a deep fringe from the lower branches. I separated the vegetable curtain with my hands, and entered this august temple with feelings of involuntary awe. The change from the bright sunlight to the comparative darkness beneath the leafy vault, was so great that I at first could

scarcely distinguish anything. When my eyes got accustomed to the gloom, however, nothing could be more beautiful than the effect of the sun's rays, which, in forcing their way through the silvered leaves and mosses, took as many varieties of colors as if they had passed through a window of painted glass, and gave the rich, subdued, and solemn light of some old cathedral.

The trunk of the tree rose, free from all branches, full forty feet from the ground, rough and knotted, and of such enormous size that it might have been taken for a mass of rock, covered with moss and lichens, while many of its boughs were nearly as thick as the trunk of any tree I had ever previously seen.

I was so absorbed in the contemplation of the vegetable giant, that for a short space I almost forgot my troubles; but as I rode away from the tree, they returned to me in full force, and my reflections were certainly of no very cheering or consolatory nature. I rode on, however, most perseveringly. The morning slipped away; it was noon, and the sun stood high in the cloudless heavens. My hunger had now increased to an insupportable degree, and I felt as if something were gnawing within me—something like a crab, tugging and riving at my stomach with his sharp claws. This feeling left me after a time, and was replaced by a sort of squeamishness—a faint, sickly sensation. But if hunger was bad, thirst was worse. For some hours I suffered martyrdom. At length, like the hunger, it died away, and was succeeded by a feeling of sickness. The thirty hours' fatigue and fasting I had endured were beginning to tell upon my naturally strong nerves: I felt my reasoning powers growing weaker, and my presence of mind leaving me. A feeling of despondency came over me—a thousand wild fancies passed through my bewildered brain; while at times my head grew dizzy, and I reeled in my saddle like a drunken man. These weak fits, as I may call them, did not last long; and each time that I recovered, I spurred my mustang onwards, but it was all in vain—ride as far and as fast as I would, nothing was visible but a boundless sea of grass.

At length I gave up all hope, except in that God whose almighty hand was so manifest in the beautiful works around me.

I let the bridle fall on my horse's neck, clasped my hands together, and prayed as I had never before prayed, so heartily and earnestly. When I had finished my prayer I felt greatly comforted. It seemed to me that here in the wilderness, which man had not as yet polluted, I was nearer to God, and that my petition would assuredly be heard. I gazed cheerfully around, persuaded that I should yet escape from the peril in which I stood. As I did so, with what astonishment and inexpressible delight did I perceive not ten paces off, the track of a horse!

The effect of this discovery was like an electric shock to me, and drew a cry of joy to my lips that made my mustang start and prick his ears. Tears of delight and gratitude to Heaven came into my eyes, and I could scarcely refrain from leaping off my horse and kissing the welcome signs that gave me assurance of succor. With renewed strength I galloped onwards; and had I been a lover flying to rescue his mistress from an Indian war party, I could not have displayed more eagerness than I did in following up the trail of an unknown traveller.

Never had I felt so thankful to Providence as at that moment. I uttered thanksgivings as I rode on, and contemplated the wonderful evidences of his skill and might that offered themselves to me on all sides. The aspect of everything seemed changed, and I gazed with renewed admiration at the scenes through which I passed, and which I had previously been too pre-occupied by the danger of my position to notice. The beautiful appearance of the islands struck me particularly as they lay in the distance, seeming to swim in the bright, golden beams of the noonday sun, like dark spots of foliage in the midst of the waving grasses and many-hued flowers of the prairie. Before me lay the eternal flower-carpet with its innumerable asters, tuberoses, and mimosas, that delicate plant which, when you approach it, lifts its head, seems to look at you, and then droops and shrinks back in alarm. This I saw it do when I was two or three paces from it, and without my horse's foot having touched it. Its long roots stretched out horizontally in the ground, and the approaching tread of a horse or man is communicated through them to the plant, and produces this singular phenomenon. When the danger is gone by, and the earth

ceases to vibrate, the mimosa may be seen to raise its head again, but quivering and trembling, as though not yet fully recovered from its fears.

I had ridden on for three or four hours, following the track I had so fortunately discovered, when I came upon the trace of a second horseman, who appeared to have here joined the first traveller. It ran in a parallel direction to the one I was following.

Had it been possible to increase my joy, this discovery would have done so. I could now entertain no doubt that I had hit upon the way out of this terrible prairie. It struck me as being rather singular that two travellers should have met in this immense plain, which so few persons traversed; but that they had done so was certain, for there was the track of the two horses as plain as possible. The trail was fresh, too, and it was evidently not long since the horsemen had passed. It might still be possible to overtake them, and in this hope I rode on faster than ever, as fast, at least, as my mustang could carry me through the thick grass and flowers, which in many places were four or five feet high.

During the next three hours I passed over some ten or twelve miles of ground; but although the trail still lay plainly and broadly marked before me, I saw nothing of those who had left it. Still I persevered. I must overtake them sooner or later, provided I did not lose the track; and that I was most careful not to do, keeping my eyes fixed upon the ground as I rode along, and never deviating from the line which the travellers had followed.

In this manner the day passed away, and evening approached. I still felt hope and courage; but my physical strength began to give way. The gnawing sensation of hunger increased. I was sick and faint; my limbs became heavy, and my blood seemed chilled in my veins, and all my senses appeared to grow duller under the influence of exhaustion, thirst, and hunger. My eyesight became misty, my hearing less acute, the bridle felt cold and heavy in my fingers.

Still I rode on. Sooner or later I must find an outlet; the prairie must have an end somewhere. It is true the whole of Southern Texas is one vast prairie; but then there are rivers flowing through it, and if I could reach one of those, I should not

be far from the abodes of men. By following the streams five or six miles up or down, I should be sure to find a plantation.

As I was thus reasoning with, and encouraging myself, I suddenly perceived the traces of a third horse, running parallel to the two which I had been so long following. This was indeed encouragement. It was certain that three travellers, arriving from different points of the prairie, and all going in the same direction must have some object, must be repairing to some village or clearing, and where or what this was, had now become indifferent to me, so long as I once more found myself amongst my fellow-men. I spurred on my mustang, who was beginning to flag a little in his pace with the fatigue of our long ride.

The sun set behind the high trees of an island that bounded my view westward, and there being little or no twilight in those southerly latitudes, the broad day was almost instantaneously replaced by the darkness of night. I could proceed no further without losing the track of the three horsemen; and as I happened to be close to an island, I fastened my mustang to a branch with the lasso, and threw myself on the grass under the trees.

This night, however, I had no fancy for tobacco. Neither the cigars nor the *dulcissimus* tempted me. I tried to sleep, but in vain. Once or twice I began to dose, but was roused again by violent cramps and twitchings in all my limbs. There is nothing more horrible than a night passed in the way I passed that one, faint and weak, enduring torture from hunger and thirst, striving after sleep and never finding it. I can only compare the sensation of hunger I experienced to that of twenty pairs of pincers tearing at my stomach.

With the first grey light of morning I got up and prepared for departure. It was a long business, however, to get my horse ready. The saddle which at other times I could throw upon his back with two fingers, now seemed made of lead, and it was as much as I could do to lift it. I had still more difficulty to draw the girths tight; but at last I accomplished this, and scrambling upon my beast rode off. Luckily my mustang's spirit was pretty well taken out of him by the last two days' work; for if he had been fresh, the smallest spring on one side would have sufficed to

throw me out of the saddle. As it was, I sat upon him like an automaton, hanging forward on his neck, sometimes grasping the mane, and almost unable to use either rein or spur.

I had ridden on for some hours in this helpless manner, when I came to a place where the three horsemen whose track I was following had apparently made a halt, perhaps passed the previous night. The grass was trampled and beaten down in a circumference of some fifty or sixty feet, and there was a confusion in the horse-tracks as if they had ridden backwards and forwards. Fearful of losing the right trace, I was looking carefully about me to see in what direction they had recommenced their journey, when I noticed something white amongst the long grass. I got off my horse to pick it up. It was a piece of paper with my own name written upon it; and I recognized it as the back of a letter in which my tobacco had been wrapped, and which I had thrown away at my halting place of the preceding night. I looked around, and recognized the island and the very tree under which I had slept, or endeavored to sleep. The horrible truth instantly flashed across me—the horse tracks I had been following were my own; since the preceding morning I had been riding *in a circle!*

· CHAPTER XX.

THE PERIL.—THE RESCUE.

READER, did you ever have your dearest hopes crushed at one fell moment? Were your fondest aspirations ever blighted at one unlooked for disaster? If not, you can but feebly imagine my feelings on realizing the dreadful fact announced at the close of the last chapter. I stood for a few seconds thunderstruck, and then sank upon the ground in utter despair. At that moment I should have been thankful to any one who would have knocked me on the head as I lay. All I wished for was to die as speedily as possible.

I remained I know not how long lying in a desponding, half insensible, state upon the grass. Several hours must have elapsed; for when I got up the sun was low in the western heavens. My head was so weak and wandering, that I could not well explain to myself how it was that I had been thus riding after my own shadow. Yet the thing was clear enough. Without landmarks, and in the monotonous scenery of the prairie, I might have gone on for ever following my horse's track, and going back when I thought I was going forwards, had it not been for the discovery of the tobacco paper. I was, as I subsequently learned, in the Jacinto prairie, one of the most beautiful in Texas, full sixty miles long and broad, but in which the most experienced hunters never risked themselves without a compass. It was little wonder then, that I, a mere boy of two-and-twenty, just escaped from college, should have gone astray in it.

I now gave myself up for lost, and with the bridle twisted

round my hand, and holding on as well as I could by the saddle and mane, I let my horse choose his own road. It would perhaps have been better if I had done this sooner. The beast's instinct would probably have led him to some plantation. When he found himself left to his own guidance, he threw up his head, snuffed the air three or four times, and then turning round, set off in a contrary direction, and at such a brisk pace that it was as much as I could do to keep upon him. Every jolt caused me so much pain, that I was more than once tempted to let myself fall off his back.

At last night came—and thanks to the lasso, which kept my horse in awe, I managed to dismount and secure him. The whole night through I suffered from racking pains in head, limbs, and body. I felt as if I had been broken on the wheel; not an inch of my whole person but ached and smarted. My hands were grown thin and transparent, my cheeks fallen in, my eyes deep sunk in their sockets. When I touched my face, I could feel the change that had taken place; and as I did so, I caught myself once or twice laughing like a child—I was becoming delirious.

In the morning I could scarcely rise from the ground, so utterly weakened and exhausted was I by my three days' fasting, anxiety, and fatigue. I have heard say that a man in good health can live nine days without food. It may be so in a room or a prison; but assuredly not in a Texian prairie. I am quite certain that the fifth day would have seen the last of me.

I should never have been able to mount my mustang, but he had fortunately lain down, so I got into the saddle, and he rose up with me and started off of his own accord. As I rode along, the strangest visions seemed to pass before me. I saw the most beautiful cities that a painter's fancy ever conceived, with towers, cupolas, and columns, the summits of which lost themselves in the clouds—marble basins and fountains of bright, sparkling water—rivers flowing with liquid gold and silver—and gardens in which the trees were bowed down with the most magnificent fruit—fruit that I had not strength enough to raise my hand and pluck. My limbs were heavy as lead, my tongue, lips and gums

dry and parched. I breathed with the greatest difficulty, and within me was a burning sensation, as if I had swallowed hot coals; while my extremities, both hands and feet, did not appear to form a part of myself, but to be instruments of torture affixed to me, and causing me the most intense suffering.

I have a confused recollection of a sort of rushing noise, the nature of which I was unable to determine, so nearly had all consciousness left me; then of finding myself amongst trees, the leaves and boughs of which scratched and beat against my face as I passed through them; then of a sudden and rapid descent, with the broad, bright surface of a river below me. I clutched at a branch, but my fingers had no strength to retain their grasp—there was a hissing, splashing noise, and the waters closed over my head.

I soon rose, and endeavored to strike out with my arms and legs, but in vain; I was too weak to swim, and again I went down. A thousand lights seemed to dance before my eyes: there was a noise in my brain as if a four-and-twenty pounder had been fired close to my ear. Just then a hard hand was wrung in to my neckcloth, and I felt myself dragged out of the water. The next instant my senses left me.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DANGEROUS DELIVERER.

WHEN I recovered from my state of insensibility, and once more opened my eyes, I was lying on the bank of a small but deep river. My horse was grazing quietly a few yards off, and beside me stood a man with folded arms, holding a wicker-covered flask in his hand. This was all I was able to observe ; for my state of weakness prevented me from getting up and looking around me.

"Where am I?" I gasped.

"Where are you, stranger? By the Jacinto ; and that you are *by* it, and not *in* it, is no fault of your'n, I reckon."

There was something harsh and repulsive in the tone and manner in which these words were spoken, and in the grating scornful laugh that accompanied them, that jarred upon my nerves, and inspired me with a feeling of aversion towards the speaker. I knew that he was my deliverer ; that he had saved my life, when my mustang, raging with thirst, had sprung head-foremost into the water ; that without him, I must inevitably have been drowned, even had the river been less deep than it was ; and that it was by his care, and the whisky he had made me swallow, and of which I still felt the flavor on my tongue, that I had been recovered from the death-like swoon into which I had fallen. But had he done ten times as much for me, I could not have repressed the repugnance, the inexplicable dislike, with which the mere tones of his voice filled me. I turned my head away in order not to see him. There was a silence of some moments' duration.

"Don't seem as if my company was over and above agreeable," said the man at last.

"Your company not agreeable? This is the fourth day since I saw the face of a human being. During that time not a bit nor a drop has passed my tongue."

"Hallo! that's a lie!" shouted the man, with another strange, wild laugh. "You have taken a mouthful out of my flask; not *taken* it, certainly, but it went over your tongue all the same. Where do you come from? The beast ain't your'n."

"Mr. Neal's," answered I.

"See it is by the brand. But what brings you here from Mr. Neal's? It's a good seventy mile to his plantation, right across the prairie. Ain't stole the horse, have you?"

"Lost my way—four days—eaten nothing."

These words were all I could articulate. I was too weak to talk.

"Four days without eatin'!" cried the man, with a laugh like the sharpening of a saw, "and that in a Texas prairie, and with islands on all sides of you! Ha! I see how it is. You're a gentleman—that's plain enough. I was a sort of one myself once. You thought our Texas prairies was like the prairies in the States. Ha, ha! And so you didn't know how to help yourself. Did you see no bees in the air, no strawberries on the earth?"

"Bees? Strawberries?" repeated I.

"Yes, bees, which live in the hollow trees. Out of twenty trees there's sure to be one full of honey. So you saw no bees, eh? Perhaps you don't know the creturs when you see em? Ain't altogether so big as wild geese or turkies. But you must know what strawberries are, and that *they* don't grow upon the trees."

All this was spoken in the same sneering, savage manner as before, with the speaker's head half turned over his shoulder, while his features were distorted into a contemptuous grin.

"And if I had seen the bees, how was I to get at the honey without an axe?"

"How did you lose yourself?"

"My mustang—ran away"—

"I see. And you after him. You'd have done better to let him run. But what d'ye mean to do now?"

"I am weak—sick to death. I wish to get to the nearest house—an inn—anywhere where men are."

"Where men are," repeated the stranger, with his scornful smile. "Where men are," he muttered again, taking a few steps on one side.

I was hardly able to turn my head, but there was something strange in the man's movement that alarmed me; and, making a violent effort, I changed my position sufficiently to get him in sight again. He had drawn a long knife from his girdle, which he clutched in one hand, while he ran the fore-finger of the other along its edge. I now for the first time got a full view of his face, and the impression it made upon me was anything but favorable. His countenance was the wildest I had ever seen; his blood-shot eyes rolled like balls of fire in their sockets; while his movements and manner were indicative of a violent inward struggle. He did not stand still for three seconds together, but paced backwards and forwards with hurried, irregular steps, casting wild glances over his shoulder, his fingers playing all the while with the knife, with the rapid and objectless movements of a maniac.

I felt convinced that I was the cause of the struggle visibly going on within him; that my life or death was what he was deciding upon. But in the state I then was, death had no terror for me. The image of my mother, sisters, and father, passed before my eyes. I gave one thought to my peaceful, happy home, and then looked upwards and prayed.

The man had walked off to some distance. I turned myself a little more round, and, as I did so, I caught sight of the same magnificent phenomenon which I had met with on the second day of my wanderings. The colossal live oak rose in all its silvery splendor, at the distance of a couple of miles. Whilst I was gazing at it, and reflecting on the strange ill luck that had made me pass within so short a distance of the river without finding it, I saw my new acquaintance approach a neighboring cluster of trees, amongst which he disappeared.

After a short time I again perceived him coming towards me with a slow and staggering step. As he drew near, I had an opportunity of examining his whole appearance. He was very

tall and lean, but large-boned, and apparently of great strength. His face, which had not been shaved for several weeks, was so tanned by sun and weather, that he might have been taken for an Indian, had not the beard proved his claim to white blood. But his eyes were what most struck me. There was something so frightfully wild in their expression, a look of terror and desperation, like that of a man whom all the furies of hell were hunting and persecuting. His hair hung in long, ragged locks over his forehead, cheeks, and neck, and round his head was bound a handkerchief, on which were several stains of a brownish black color. Spots of the same kind were visible upon his leathern jacket, breeches, and moccasins; they were evidently blood-stains. His hunting knife, which was nearly two feet long, with a rude, wooden handle, was now replaced in his girdle, but in its stead he held a Kentucky rifle in his hand.

Although I did my utmost to assume an indifferent countenance, my features doubtless expressed something of the repugnance and horror with which the man inspired me. He looked loweringly at me for a moment from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"You don't seem to like the company you've got into," said he. "Do I look so very desperate, then? Is it written so plainly on my face?"

"What should there be written upon your face?"

"What? What? Fools and children ask them questions."

"I will ask you none; but as a Christian, as my countryman, I beseech you——"

"Christian!" interrupted he, with a hollow laugh. "Countryman!" He struck the butt of his rifle hard upon the ground. "That is my countryman—my only friend!" he continued, as he examined the flint and lock of his weapon. "That releases from all troubles; that's a true friend. Pooh! perhaps it'll release you too—put you to rest."

These last words were uttered aside, and musingly.

"Put him to rest, as well as——Pooh! One more or less—Perhaps it would drive away that cursed spectre!"

All this seemed to be spoken to his rifle.

"Will you swear not to betray me?" cried he to me. "Else, one touch——"

As he spoke, he brought the gun to his shoulder, the muzzle pointed full at my breast.

I felt no fear. I am sure my pulse did not give a throb the more for this menace. So deadly weak and helpless as I lay, it was unnecessary to shoot me. The slightest blow from the butt of the rifle would have driven the last faint spark of life out of my exhausted body. I looked calmly, indifferently even, into the muzzle of the piece.

"If you can answer it to your God, to your and my Judge and Creator, do your will."

My words, which from faintness I could scarcely render audible, had, nevertheless, a sudden and startling effect upon the man. He trembled from head to foot, let the butt of his gun fall heavily to the ground, and gazed at me with open mouth and staring eyes.

"This one, too, comes with his God!" muttered he. "God! and your and my Creator—and—Judge."

He seemed hardly able to articulate these words, which were uttered by gasps and efforts, as though something had been choking him.

"His and my—Judge!"—groaned he, again. "Can there be a God, a Creator and Judge?"

As he stood thus muttering to himself, his eyes suddenly became fixed, and his features horribly distorted.

"Do it not!" cried he, in a shrill tone of horror, that rang through my head. "It will bring no blessing with it. I am a dead man! God be merciful to me! My poor wife, my poor children!"

The rifle fell from his hands, and he smote his breast and forehead in a paroxysm of the wildest fury. It was frightful to behold the conscience-stricken wretch, stamping madly about, and casting glances of terror behind, as though demons had been hunting him down. The foam flew from his mouth, and I expected each moment to see him fall to the ground in a fit of epilepsy. Gradually, however, he became more tranquil.

"D'ye see nothin' in my face?" said he, in a hoarse whisper, suddenly pausing close to where I lay.

"What should I see?"

He came yet nearer.

"Look well at me—*through* me, if you can. D'ye see nothin' now?"

"I see nothing," replied I.

"Ah! I understand; you can see nothin'. Ain't in a spyin' humor, I calkilate. No, no, that you ain't. After four days and nights fastin', one loses the fancy for many things. I've tried it for two days myself. So you are weak and faint, eh? But I needn't ask that, I reckon. You look bad enough. Take another drop of whisky; it'll strengthen you. But wait till I mix it."

As he spoke, he stepped down to the edge of the river, and scooping up the water in the hollow of his hand, filled his flask with it. Then returning to me, he poured a little into my mouth.

Even the bloodthirsty Indian appears less of a savage when engaged in a compassionate act, and the wild desperado I had fallen in with, seemed softened and humanized by the service he was rendering me. His voice sounded less harsh; his manner was calmer and milder.

"You wish to go to an inn?"

"For Heaven's sake, yes. These four days I have tasted nothing but a bit of tobacco."

"Can you spare a bit of that?"

"All I have."

I handed him my cigar case, and the roll of *dulcissimus*. He snatched the latter from me, and bit into it with the furious eagerness of a wolf.

"Ah, the right sort this!" muttered he to himself. "Ah, young man, or old man—you're an old man, ain't you? How old are you?"

"Two-and-twenty."

He shook his head, doubtingly.

"Can hardly believe that. But four days in the prairie, and nothin' to eat. Well, it may be so. But, stranger, if I had had

this bit of tobacco only ten days ago—a bit of tobacco is worth a deal sometimes. It might have saved a man's life!"

Again he groaned, and his accents became wild and unnatural.

"I say, stranger!" cried he, in a threatening tone. "I say! d'ye see yonder live oak? D'ye see it? It's the Patriarch, and a finer and mightier one you won't find in the prairies, I reckon. D'ye see it?"

"I do see it."

"Ah! you see it," cried he, fiercely. "And what is it to you? What have you to do with the Patriarch, or with what lies under it? I reckon you had best not be too curious that way. If you dare take a step under that tree—" He swore an oath too horrible to be repeated.

"There's a spectre there," cried he; "a spectre that would fright you to death. Better keep away."

"I will keep away," replied L. "I never thought of going near it. All I want is to get to the nearest plantation or inn."

"Ah! true, man—the next inn. I'll show you the way to it. I will."

"You will save my life by so doing," said L, "and I shall be ever grateful to you as my deliverer."

"Deliverer," repeated he, with a wild laugh. "Pooh! If you knew what sort of a deliverer—Pooh! What's the use of savin' a life, when—yet I will—I will save yours; perhaps the cursed spectre will leave me then. Will you not? Will you not?" cried he, suddenly changing his scornful mocking tones to those of entreaty and supplication, and turning his face in the direction of the live oak. Again his wildness of manner returned, and his eyes became fixed, as he gazed for some moments at the gigantic tree. Then darting away, he disappeared among the trees, whence he had fetched his rifle, and presently emerged again, leading a ready saddled horse with him. He called to me to mount mine, but seeing that I was unable even to rise from the ground, he stepped up to me, and with the greatest ease lifted me into the saddle with one hand, so light had I become during my long fast. Then taking the end of my lasso, he got upon his own horse and set off, leading my mustang after him.

We rode on for some time without exchanging a word. My guide kept up a sort of muttered soliloquy ; but as I was full ten paces in his rear, I could distinguish nothing of what he said. At times he would raise his rifle to his shoulder, then lower it again, and speak to it, sometimes caressingly, sometimes in anger. More than once he turned his head, and cast keen, searching glances at me, as though to see whether I were watching him or not.

We had ridden more than an hour, and the strength which the whisky had given me was fast failing, so that I expected each moment to fall from my horse, when suddenly I caught sight of a kind of rude hedge, and almost immediately afterwards the wall of a small blockhouse became visible. A faint cry of joy escaped me, and I endeavored, but in vain, to give my horse the spur. My guide turned round, fixed his wild eyes upon me, and spoke in a threatening tone.

"You are impatient, man ! impatient, I see. You think now, perhaps"——

"I am dying," was all I could utter. In fact, my senses were leaving me from exhaustion, and I really thought my last hour was come.

"Pooh ! dyin !" One don't die so easy. And yet—d——n !—it might be true."

He sprang off his horse, and was just in time to catch me in his arms as I fell from the saddle. A few drops of whisky, however, restored me to consciousness. My guide replaced me upon my mustang, and after passing through a potato ground, a field of Indian corn, and a small grove of peach-trees, we found ourselves at the door of the blockhouse.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SELF-ACCUSED.

I WAS so utterly helpless, that my strange companion was obliged to lift me off my horse, and carry me into the dwelling. He sat me down upon a bench, passive and powerless as an infant. Strange to say, however, I was never better able to observe all that passed around me, than during the few hours of bodily debility that succeeded my immersion in the Jacinto. A blow with a reed would have knocked me off my seat, but my mental faculties, instead of participating in this weakness, seemed sharpened to an unusual degree of acuteness.

The blockhouse in which we now were, was of the poorest possible description ; a mere log hut, consisting of one room, that served as kitchen, sitting-room, and bedchamber. The door of rough planks swung heavily upon two hooks that fitted into iron rings, and formed a clumsy substitute for hinges ; a wooden latch and heavy bar served to secure it ; windows, properly speaking, there were none, but in their stead a few holes covered with dirty oiled paper ; the floor was of clay, stamped hard and dry in the middle of the hut, but out of which, at the sides of the room, a crop of rank grass was growing, a foot or more high. In one corner stood a clumsy bedstead, in another a sort of table or counter, on which were half a dozen drinking glasses of various sizes and patterns. The table consisted of four thick posts, firmly planted in the ground, and on which were nailed three boards that had apparently belonged to some chest or case, for they were partly painted, and there was a date, and the three first letters of a word upon

one of them. A shelf fixed against the side of the hut supported an earthen pot or two, and three or four bottles, uncorked, and apparently empty; and from some wooden pegs wedged in between the logs, hung suspended a few articles of wearing apparel of no very cleanly aspect.

Pacing up and down the hut with a kind of stealthy cat-like pace, was an individual, whose unprepossessing exterior was in good keeping with the wretched appearance of this Texian shebeen house. He was an undersized, stooping figure, red-haired, large mouthed, and possessed of small reddish, pig's eyes, which he seemed totally unable to raise from the ground, and the lowering, hang-dog expression of which corresponded fully with the treacherous, panther-like stealthiness of his step and movements. Without greeting us either by word or look, this personage dived into a dark corner of his tenement, brought out a full bottle, and placing it on the table beside the glasses, resumed the monotonous sort of exercise in which he had been indulging on our entrance.

My guide and deliverer said nothing while the tavern-keeper was getting out the bottle, although he seemed to watch all his movements with a keen and suspicious eye. He now filled a large glass of spirits, and tossed it off at a single draught. When he had done this, he spoke for the first time.

"Johnny!"

Johnny made no answer.

"This gentleman has eaten nothing for four days."

"Indeed," replied Johnny, without looking up, or interrupting his sneaking, restless walk from one corner of the room to the other.

"I said four days, d'ye hear? Four days. Bring him tea immediately, strong tea, and then make some good beef soup. The tea must be ready directly, the soup in an hour at farthest, d'ye understand? And then I want some whisky for myself, and a beefsteak and potatoes. Now, tell all that to your Sambo."

Johnny did not seem to hear, but continued his walk, creeping along with noiseless step, and each time that he turned, giving a sort of spring like a cat or a panther.

"I've money, Johnny," said my guide. "Money, man, d'ye hear?" And so saying he produced a tolerably full purse.

For the first time, Johnny raised his head, gave an indefinable sort of glance at the purse, and then springing forward, fixed his small, cunning eyes upon those of my guide, while a smile of strange meaning spread over his repulsive features.

The two men stood for the space of a minute, staring at each other, without uttering a word. An infernal grin distended Johnny's coarse mouth from ear to ear. My guide seemed to gasp for breath.

"I've money," cried he at last, striking the butt of his rifle violently on the ground. "D'ye understand, Johnny? Money; and a rifle too, if needs be."

He stepped to the table and filled another glass of raw spirits, which disappeared like the preceding one. While he drank, Johnny stole out of the room so softly, that my companion was only made aware of his departure by the noise of the wooden latch. He then came up to me, took me in his arms without saying a word, and carrying me to the bed, laid me gently down upon it.

"You make yourself at home," snarled Johnny, who just then came in again.

"Always do that, I reckon, when I'm in a tavern," answered my guide, quietly pouring out and swallowing another glassful. "The gentleman shall have your bed to-day. Yon and Sambo may sleep in the pigsty. Yon have none though, I believe?"

"Bob!" screamed Johnny, furiously.

"That's my name—Bob Rock."

"For the present," hissed Johnny, with a sneer.

"The same as yours is Johnny Down," replied Bob in the same tone. "Pooh! Johnny, guess we know one another?"

"Rayther calkilate we do," replied Johnny, through his teeth.

"And have done many a day," laughed Bob.

"You're the famous Bob from Sodoma in Georgia?"

"Sodoma in Alabama, Johnny. Sodoma lies in Alabama," said Bob, filling another glass. "Don't you know that yet, you who were above a year in Columbus, doin' all sorts of dirty work?"

"Better hold your tongue, Bob," said Johnny, with a dangerous look at me.

"Pooh ! Don't mind him ; he won't talk, I'll answer for it. He's lost the taste for chatterin' in the Jacinto prairie. But Sodoma," continued Bob, "is in Alabama, man ! Columbus in Georgia ! They are parted by the Chatahoochie. Ah ! that was a jolly life we led on the Chatahoochie. But nothin' lasts in this world, as my old schoolmaster used to say. Pooh ! They've druv the Injuns a step further over the Mississippi now. But it was a glorious life—warn't it ?"

Again he filled his glass and drank.

The information I gathered from this conversation as to the previous life and habits of these two men, had nothing in it very satisfactory or reassuring for me. In the whole of the south-western states there was no place that could boast of being the resort of so many outlaws and bad characters as the town of Sodoma. It is situated, or was situated, at least, a few years previously to the time I speak of, in Alabama, on Indian ground, and was the harbor of refuge for all the murderers and outcasts from the western and south-western parts of the Union. Here, under Indian government, they found shelter and security ; and frightful were the crimes and cruelties perpetrated at this place. Scarcely a day passed without an assassination, not secretly committed, but in broad sunlight. Bands of these wretches, armed with knives and rifles, used to cross the Chatahoochie, and make inroads into Columbus ; break into houses, rob, murder, ill-treat women, and then return in triumph to their dens, laden with booty, and laughing at the laws. It was useless to think of pursuing them, or of obtaining justice, for they were on Indian territory ; and many of the chiefs were in league with them. At length General Jackson and the government took it up. The Indians were driven over the Mississippi, the outlaws and murderers fled, Sodoma itself disappeared ; and, released from its troublesome neighbors, Columbus is now in as flourishing a state as any place in the west.

The recollections of their former life and exploits seemed highly interesting to the two comrades ; and their communications became more and more confidential. Johnny filled himself a glass,

and the conversation soon increased in animation. I could understand little of what they said, for they spoke a sort of thieves' jargon. After a time, their voices sounded as a confused hum in my ears, the objects in the room became gradually less distinct, and I fell asleep.

I was roused, not very gently, by a mulatto woman, who poured a spoonful of tea into my mouth before I had well opened my eyes. She at first did not appear to be attending to me with any great degree of good-will; but by the time she had given me half a dozen spoonfuls her womanly sympathies began to be awakened, and her manner became kinder. The tea did me an infinite deal of good, and seemed to infuse new life into my veins. I finished the cup, and the mulatto laid me down again on my pillow with far more gentleness than she had lifted me up.

"Gor! Gor!" cried she, "what poor young man! Berry weak. Him soon better. One hour, massa, good soup."

"Soup! What do you want with soup?" grumbled Johnny.

"Him take soup. I cook it," screamed the woman.

"Worse for you if she don't, Johnny," said Bob.

Johnny muttered something in reply, but I did not distinguish what it was, for my eyes closed, and I again fell asleep.

It seemed to me as if I had not been five minutes slumbering when the mulatto returned with the soup. The tea had revived me, but this gave me strength; and when I had taken it I was able to sit up in my bed.

While the woman was feeding me, Bob was eating his beefsteak. It was a piece of meat that might have sufficed for six persons, but the man seemed as hungry as if he had eaten nothing for three days. He cut off wedges half as big as his fist, swallowed them with ravenous eagerness, and, instead of bread, bit into some unpeeled potatoes. All this was washed down with glass after glass of raw spirits, which had the effect of wakening him up, and infusing a certain degree of cheerfulness into his strange humor. He still spoke more to himself than to Johnny, but his recollections seemed agreeable; he nodded self-approvingly, and sometimes laughed aloud. At last he began to abuse Johnny for

being, as he said, such a sneaking, cowardly fellow—such a treacherous, false-hearted gallows-bird.

"It's true," said he, "I am gallows-bird enough myself, but then I'm open, and no man can say I'm a-fear'd; but Johnny, Johnny, who——"

"I do not know what he was about to say, for Johnny sprang towards him, and placed both hands over his mouth, receiving in return a blow that knocked him as far as the door, through which he retreated, cursing and grumbling.

I soon fell asleep again, and whilst in that state I had a confused sort of consciousness of various noises in the room, loud words, blows, and shouting. Wearied as I was, however, I believe no noise would have fully roused me, although hunger at last did.

When I opened my eyes I saw the mulatto woman sitting by my bed, and keeping off the mosquitoes. She brought me the remainder of the soup, and promised, if I would sleep a couple of hours more, to bring me a beefsteak. Before the two hours had elapsed I awoke, hungrier than ever. After I had eaten all the beefsteak the woman would allow me, which was a very moderate quantity, she brought me a beer-glass full of the most delicious punch I ever tasted. I asked her where she had got the rum and lemons, and she told me that it was she who had bought them, as well as a stock of coffee and tea; that Johnny was her partner, but that he had done nothing but build the house, and badly built it was. She then began to abuse Johnny, and said he was a gambler; and, worse still, that he had had plenty of money once, but had lost all; that she had first known him in Lower Natchez, but he had been obliged to run away from there in the night to save his neck. Bob was no better, she said; on the contrary—and here she made the gesture of cutting a man's throat—he was a very bad fellow, she added. He had got drunk after his dinner, knocked Johnny down, and broken everything. He was now lying asleep outside the door; and Johnny had hidden himself somewhere.

How long she continued speaking I know not, for I again fell into a deep sleep, which this time lasted six or seven hours.

I was awakened by a strong grasp laid upon my arm, which

made me cry out, more, however, from surprise than pain. Bob stood by my bedside; the traces of the preceding night's debauch plainly written on his countenance. His bloodshot eyes were inflamed and swollen, and rolled with even more than their usual wildness: his mouth was open, and the jaws stiff and fixed; he looked as if he had just come from committing some frightful deed. I could fancy the first murderer to have worn such an aspect when gazing on the body of his slaughtered brother. I shrank back, horror-struck at his appearance.

"In God's name, man, what do you want?"

He made no answer.

"You are in a fever. You've the ague!"

"Ay, a fever," groaned he, shivering as he spoke; "a fever, but not the one you mean; a fever, young man, such as God keep you from ever having."

His whole frame shuddered while he uttered these words. There was a short pause.

"Curious that," continued he; "I've served more than one in the same way, but never thought of it afterwards—was forgotten in less than no time. Got to pay the whole score at once, I suppose. In the open prairie it's the worst; there stands the old man so plain, with his silver beard, and the spectre just behind him."

His eyes rolled, he clenched his fists, and, striking his forehead furiously, rushed out of the hut.

In a few minutes he returned, apparently more composed, and walked straight up to my bed.

"Stranger, you must do me a service," said he abruptly.

"Ten rather than one," replied I; "anything that is in my power. Do I not owe you my life?"

"You are a gentleman, I see, and a Christian. You must come with me to the squire—the Alcalde."

"To the Alcalde, man! What must I go there for?"

"You'll see and hear when you get there; I've something to tell him—something for his own ear."

He drew a deep breath, and remained silent for a short time, gazing anxiously on all sides of him.

"Something," whispered he, "that nobody else must hear."

"But there's Johnny, there—why not take him?"

"Johnny!" cried he, with a scornful laugh; "Johnny! who's ten times worse than I am, bad as I be!—and bad I am, to be sure, but yet open and above board, always, till this time; but Johnny! he'd sell his own mother. He's a cowardly, sneakin', treacherous hound, is Johnny."

It was unnecessary to tell me this, for Johnny's character was written plainly enough upon his countenance.

"But why do you want me to go to the Alcalde?"

"Why does one want people before the judge? He's a judge, man—a Mexican one, certainly, but chosen by us Americans; and an American himself, as you and I are."

"And how soon must I go?"

"Directly. I can't bear it any longer. It leaves me no peace. Not an hour's rest have I had for the last eight days. When I get out into the prairie, the spectre stands before me and beckons me on; and if I try to go another way, he comes behind me and drives me before him under the Patriarch. I see him just as plainly as when he was alive, only paler and sadder. It seems as if I could touch him with my hand. Even the bottle is no use now; neither rum, nor whisky, nor brandy, rid me of him; it don't, by the 'tarnel. Curious, that! I got drunk yesterday—thought to get rid of him; but he came in the night and drove me out. I was obliged to go. Wouldn't let me sleep; was forced to go under the Patriarch."

"Under the Patriarch? the live oak?" cried I, in astonishment. "Were you there in the night?"

"Ay, that was I," replied he, in the same horribly confidential tone; and the spirit threatened me, and said, 'I will leave you no peace, Bob, till you go to the Alcalde and tell him——'

"Then I will go with you to the Alcalde, and that immediately," said I, raising myself up in bed. I could not help pitying the poor fellow from my very soul.

"Where are you going?" croaked Johnny, who at this moment glided into the room. "Not a step shall you stir till you've paid."

"Johnny," said Bob, seizing his less powerful companion by the shoulders, lifting him up like a child, and then setting him down again with such force, that his knees cracked and bent under him :—" Johnny, this gentleman is my guest, d'ye understand ? And here is the reckonin', and mind yourself, Johnny—mind yourself, that's all."

Johnny crept into a corner like a flogged hound ; the mulatto woman, however, did not seem disposed to be so easily intimidated. Sticking her arms in her sides, she waddled boldly forward.

" You not take him 'way, Massa Bob ?" screamed she. " Him stop here. Him berry weak—not able for ride—not able for stand on him foot."

This was true enough. Strong as I had felt in bed, I could hardly stand upright when I got out of it.

For a moment Bob seemed undecided, but only for one moment ; then, stepping up to the mulatto, he lifted her, fat and heavy as she was, in the same manner as he had done her partner, at least a foot from the ground, and carried her screaming and struggling to the door, which he kicked open. Then setting her down outside, " Silence !" roared he, " and some good strong tea instead of your cursed chatter, and a fresh beefsteak instead of your stinking carcass. That will strengthen the gentleman ; so be quick about it, you old brown-skinned beast, you !"

I had slept in my clothes, and my toilet was consequently soon made, by the help of a bowl of water and towel, which Bob made Johnny bring, and then ordered him to go and get our horses ready.

A hearty breakfast of tea, butter, Indian corn bread, and steaks, increased my strength so much, that I was able to mount my mustang. I had still pains in all my limbs, but we rode slowly ; the morning was bright, the air fresh and elastic, and I felt myself getting gradually better. Our path led through the prairie—the river fringed with wood on the one hand, and the vast ocean of grass, sprinkled with innumerable islands of trees, on the other. We saw abundance of game, which sprang up under the very feet of our horses ; but although Bob had his rifle, he

made no use of it. He muttered continually to himself, and seemed to be arranging what he should say to the judge; for I heard him talking of things which I would just as soon not have listened to, if I could have helped it. I was heartily glad when we at length reached the plantation of the Alcalde.

It seemed a very considerable one, and the size and appearance of the framework house bespoke comfort and every luxury. The building was surrounded by a group of China trees, which I should have thought about ten years of age, but which I afterwards learned had not been planted half that time, although they were already large enough to afford a very agreeable shade. Right in front of the house rose a live oak, inferior in size to the one in the prairie, but still of immense age and great beauty. To the left were some two hundred acres of cotton fields, extending to the bank of the Jacinto, which at this spot made a sharp turn, and winding round the plantation, enclosed it on three sides. Before the house lay the prairie, with its archipelago of islands, and herds of grazing cattle and mustangs; to the right, more cotton fields; and in rear of the dwelling, the negro cottages and out-buildings. There was a Sabbath-like stillness pervading the whole scene, which seemed to strike even Bob. He paused, as though in deep thought, and allowed his hand to rest for a moment on the handle of the lattice door. Then with a sudden and resolute jerk, bespeaking an equally sudden resolution, he pushed open the gate, and we entered a garden planted with orange, banana, and citron trees, the path through which was enclosed between palisades, and led to a sort of front court, with another lattice-work door, beside which hung a bell. Upon ringing this, a negro appeared.

The black seemed to know Bob very well, for he nodded to him as to an old acquaintance, and said the squire wanted him, and had asked after him several times. He then led the way to a large parlor, very handsomely furnished for Texas, and in which we found the squire, or more properly speaking, the Alcalde, sitting smoking his cigar. He had just breakfasted, and the plates and dishes were still upon the table. He did not appear to be much given to compliments or ceremony, or to partake at all of the general failing of curiosity, for he answered our salutation

with a laconic "good morning," and scarcely even looked at us. At the very first glance, it was easy to see that he came from Tennessee or Virginia, the only provinces in which one finds men of his gigantic mould. Even sitting, his head rose above those of the negro servants in waiting. Nor was his height alone remarkable; he had the true West-Virginian build; the enormous chest and shoulders, and herculean limbs, the massive features and sharp grey eyes; altogether an exterior well calculated to impose on the rough backwoodsmen with whom he had to deal.

I was tired with my ride, and took a chair. The squire apparently did not deem me worthy of notice, or else he reserved me for a later scrutiny; but he fixed a long, searching look upon Bob, who remained standing, with his head sunk on his breast.

The judge at last broke silence.

"So here you are again, Bob. It's long since we have seen you, and I thought you had clean forgotten us. Well, Bob, we shouldn't have broke our hearts, I reckon; for I hate gamblers—ay, that I do—worse than skunks. It's a vile thing is play, and has ruined many a man in this world, and the next. It's ruined you, too, Bob."

Bob said nothing.

"You'd have been mighty useful here last week; there was plenty for you to do. My step-daughter arrived; but as you weren't to be found, we had to send to Joel to shoot us a buck and a couple of dozen snipes. Ah, Bob! one might still make a good citizen of you, if you'd only leave off that cursed play!"

Bob still remained silent.

"Now go into the kitchen and get some breakfast."

Bob neither answered nor moved.

"D'ye hear? Go into the kitchen and get something to eat. And, Ptoly," added he to the negro—"tell Veny to give him a piut of rum."

"Don't want yer rum—ain't thirsty," growled Bob.

"Very like, very like," said the judge sharply. "Reckon you've taken too much already. Look as if you could swallow a wild cat, claws and all. And you," added he, turning to me, "what the

devil are you at, Ptoly? Don't you see the man wants his breakfast? Where's the coffee? Or would you rather have tea?"

"Thank you, Alealde, I have breakfasted already."

"Don't look as if. Ain't siek, are you? Where do you come from? What's happened to you? What are you doing with Bob."

He looked keenly and searchingly at me, and then again at Bob. My appearance was certainly not very prepossessing, unshaven as I was, and with my clothes and linen soiled and torn. He was evidently considering what could be the motive of our visit, and what had brought me into Bob's society. The result of his physiognomical observations did not appear very favorable either to me or my companion. I hastened to explain.

"You shall hear how it was, judge. I am indebted to Bob for my life."

"Your life! Indebted to Bob for your life!" repeated the judge, shaking his head incredulously.

I related how I had lost my way in the prairie; been carried into the Jacinto by my horse; and how I should inevitably have been drowned, but for Bob's aid.

"Indeed!" said the judge, when I had done speaking. "So, Bob saved your life! Well, I am glad of it. Ah! if you could only keep away from that Johnny. I tell you, Bob, Johnny will be the ruin of you. Better keep out of his way."

"It's too late," answered Bob.

"Don't know why it should be. Never too late to leave a debauched, sinful life; never, man!"

"Calkilate it is, though," replied Bob, sullenly.

"You calculate it is?" said the judge, fixing his eyes on him. "And why do you calculate that? Take a glass—Ptoly, a glass—and tell me, man, why should it be too late?"

"I ain't thirsty, squire," said Bob.

"Don't talk to me of your thirst; rum's not for thirst, but to strengthen the heart and nerves, to drive away the blue devils. And a good thing it is, taken in moderation."

As he spoke he filled himself a glass, and drank half of it off. Bob shook his head.

"No rum for me, squire. I take no pleasure in it. I've something on my mind too heavy for rum to wash away."

"And what is that, Bob? Come, let's hear what you've got to say. Or, perhaps, you'd rather speak to me alone. It's Sunday to-day, and no business ought to be done; but for once, and for you, we'll make an exception."

"I brought the gentleman with me on purpose to witness what I had to say," answered Bob, taking a cigar out of a box that stood on the table, and lighting it. He smoked a whiff or two, looked thoughtfully at the judge, and then threw the cigar through the open window.

"It don't relish, squire; nothin' does now."

"Ah, Bob! if you'd leave off play and drink! They're your ruin; worse than ague or fever."

"It's no use," continued Bob, as if he did not hear the judge's remark; "it must out. I fo't agin it, and tried to drive it away, but it can't be done. I've put a bit of lead into several before now, but this one——"

"What's that?" cried the judge, chucking his cigar away, and looking sternly at Bob. "What's up now? What are you saying about a bit of lead? None of your Sodoma and Lower Natchez tricks, I hope? They won't do here. Don't understand such jokes."

"Pooh! they don't understand them a bit more in Natchez. If they did, I shouldn't be in Texas."

"The less said of that the better, Bob. You promised to lead a new life here; so we won't rake up old stories."

"I did, I did!" groaned Bob; "but it's all no use. I shall never be better till I'm hung."

I stared at the man in astonishment. The judge, however, took another cigar, lighted it, and after puffing out a cloud of smoke, said, very unconcernedly—

"Not better till you are hung! What do you want to be hung for? To be sure, you should have been long ago, if the Georgia and Alabama papers don't lie. But we are not in the States here, but in Texas, under Mexican laws. It's nothing to us what

you've done yonder. Where there is no accuser there can be no judge."

"Send away the nigger, squire," said Bob. "What a free white man has to say, shouldn't be heard by black ears."

"Go away, Ptoiy," said the judge. "Now, then," added he, turning to Bob, "say what you have to say; but mind, nobody forces you to do it, and it's only out of good will that I listen to you, for to-day's Sunday."

"I know that," muttered Bob; "I know that, squire; but it leaves me no peace, and it must out. I've been to San Felipe de Austin, to Anahuac, everywhere, but it's all no use. Wherever I go, the spectre follows me, and drives me back under the cursed Patriarch."

"Under the Patriarch!" exclaimed the judge.

"Ay, under the Patriarch!" groaned Bob. "Don't you know the Patriarch; the old live oak near the ford, on the Jacinto?"

"I know, I know!" answered the judge. "And what drives you under the Patriarch?"

"Who drives me? What drives a man who—who——"

"A man who——" repeated the judge, gently.

"A man," continued Bob, in the same low tone, "who has sent a rifle bullet into another's heart. He lies there, under the Patriarch, whom I——"

"Whom you?" asked the judge.

"*Whom I killed!*" said Bob, in a hollow whisper.

"Killed!" exclaimed the judge. "You killed him. Whom?"

"Ah! whom? Why don't you let be speak? You always interrupt me with your palaver," growled Bob.

"You are getting saucy, Bob," said the judge, impatiently. "Go on, however. I reckon it's only one of your usual tantrums."

Bob shook his head. The judge looked keenly at him for a moment, and then resumed in a sort of confidential, encouraging tone.

"Under the Patriarch; and how did he come under the Patriarch?"

"I dragged him there, and buried him there," replied Bob.

‘ Dragged him there ! Why did you drag him there ? ’

“ Because he couldn’t go himself, with more than half an ounce of lead in his body.”

“ And *you* put the half ounce of lead into him, Bob ? Well, if it was Johnny, you’ve done the country a service, and saved it a rope.”

Bob shook his head negatively.

“ It wasn’t Johnny, although——But you shall hear all about it. It’s just ten days since you paid me twenty dollars fifty.”

“ I did so, Bob ; twenty dollars fifty cents ; and I advised you at the same time to let the money lie till you had a couple of hundred dollars, or enough to buy a quarter or an eighth of Sitio land ; but advice is thrown away upon you.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GAMBLER'S STORY—THE MURDER.

BOB having taken a long draught of water—a beverage some what new to his palate—commenced the narration of his own crimes as follows :—

“ Well, squire, when I got the money I thought I'd go down to San Felipe, to the Mexicans, and try my luck ; and, at the same time, to see the doctor about my fever. As I was goin' there, I passed near Johnny's house, and fancied a glass, but determined not to get off my horse. I rode up to the window and looked in. There was a man sittin' at the table, havin' a hearty good dinner of steaks and potatoes, and washin' it down with a stiff glass of grog. I began to feel hungry myself, and while I was considerin' whether I should 'light or not, Johnny came sneakin' out, and whispered to me to come in, that there was a man inside with whom somethin' might be done if we went the right way to work ; a man who had a leather belt round his waist cram-full of hard Jackson ; and that if we got out the cards, and pretended to play a little together, he would soon take the bait and join us

“ I wasn't much inclined to do it,” continued Bob ; “ but Johnny bothered me so to go in, that I got off my horse. As I did so the dollars chinked in my pocket, and the sound gave me a wish to play.

“ I went in ; and Johnny fetched the whisky bottle. One glass followed another. There were beefsteaks and potatoes too, but I only eat a couple of mouthfuls. When I had drank two, three, ay, four glasses, Johnny brought the cards and dice. Hallo,

Johnny,' says I, 'cards and dice, Johnny! I've twenty dollars fifty in my pocket. Let's have a game! But no more drink for me; for I know you, Johnny, I know you——'

"Johnny larfed slyly, and rattled the dice, and we sat down to play. I hadn't meant to drink any more, but play makes one thirsty; and with every glass I got more eager, and my dollars got fewer. I reckoned, however, that the stranger would join us, and that I should be able to win back from him; but not a bit of it: he sat quite quiet, and eat and drank as if he didn't see we were there. I went on playin' madder than ever, and before half an hour was over, I was cleaned out; my twenty dollars fifty gone to the devil, or what's the same thing, into Johnny's pocket.

"When I found myself without a cent, I *was* mad, I reckon. It warn't the first time, nor the hundredth, that I had lost money. Many bigger sums than that—ay, hundreds and thousands of dollars had I played away—but they had none of them cost me the hundredth or thousandth part of the trouble to get, that these twenty dollars fifty had; two full months had I been slavin' away in the woods and prairies to airn them, and I caught the fever there. The fever I had still, but no money to cure it with. Johnny only larfed in my face, and rattled my dollars. I made a hit at him, which, if he hadn't jumped on one side, would have cured him of larfin' for a week or two.

"Presently, however, he came sneakin' up to me, and walkin' and whisperin'; and, 'Bob,' says he, 'is it come to that with you? are you grown so chicken-hearted that you don't see the belt full of money round his body?' said he, lookin' at it. 'No end of hard coin, I guess; and all to be had for little more than half an ounce of lead.'

"Did he say that?" asked the judge

"Ay, that did he, but I wouldn't listen to him. I was mad with him for winning my twenty dollars; and I told him that if he wanted the stranger's purse, he might take it himself and be d——d; that I wasn't goin' to pull the hot chestnuts out of the fire for him. And I got on my horse, and rode away like mad.

"My head spun round like a mill. I couldn't get over my loss. I took the twenty dollars fifty more to heart than any money I had

ever gambled. I didn't know where to go. I didn't dare go back to you, for I knew you would scold me."

"I shouldn't have scolded you, Bob ; or, if I had, it would only have been for your good. I should have summoned Johnny before me, called together a jury of twelve of the neighbors, got you back your twenty dollars fifty, and sent Johnny out of the country ; or, better still, out of the world."

These words were spoken with much phlegm, but yet with a degree of feeling and sympathy which greatly improved my opinion of the worthy judge. Bob also seemed touched. He drew a deep sigh, and gazed at the Alcalde with a melancholy look.

"It's too late," muttered he ; "too late, squire."

"Perhaps not," replied the judge, "but let's hear the rest."

"Well," continued Bob, "I kept riding on at random, and when evenin' came I found myself near the palmetta field on the bank of the Jacinto. As I was ridin' past it, I heard all at once the tramp of a horse. At that moment the queerest feelin' I ever had came over me ; a sort of cold shiverin' feel. I forgot where I was ; sight and hearin' left me ; I could only see two things, my twenty dollars fifty, and the well-filled belt of the stranger I had left at Johnny's. Just then a voice called to me.

"'Whence come, countryman, and whither going ?' it said.

"'Whence and whither,' answered I, as surlily as could be, 'to the devil at a gallop, and you'd better ride on and tell him I'm comin'.'

"'You can do the errand yourself,' answered the stranger, larfin' ; 'my road don't lie that way.'

"As he spoke I looked round, and saw, what I was pretty sure of before, that it was the man with the belt full of money.

"'Ain't you the stranger I see'd in the inn yonder ?' asked he.

"'And if I am,' says I, 'what's that to you ?'

"'Nothin',' said he, 'nothin', certainly.'

"'Better ride on,' says I ; 'and leave me quiet.'

"'Will so, stranger ; but you needn't take it so mighty onkind. A word ain't a tomahawk, I reckon,' said he. 'But I rayther expect your losins at play ain't put you in a very church-goin'

humor; and, if I was you, I'd keep my dollars in my pocket, and not set them on cards and dice.'

"This put me in a rile, to hear him cast my losins in my teeth that way.

" 'You're a nice feller,' said I, 'to throw a man's losses in his face. A pitiful chap *you* are,' says I.

"I thought to provoke him, and that he'd tackle me. But he seemed to have no fancy for a fight, for he said quite humble like—

" 'I throw nothin' in your face; God forbid that I should reproach you with your losses! I'm sorry for you, on the contrary. Don't look like a man who can afford to lose his dollars. Seem to me one who airns his money by hard work.'

"We were just then halted at the further end of the cane brake close to the trees that border the Jacinto. I had turned my horse, and was frontin' the stranger. And all the time the devil was whisperin' to me, and pointin' to the belt round the man's waist. I could see where it was, plain enough, though he had buttoned his coat over it.

" 'Hard work, indeed,' says I; 'and now I've lost everything; not a cent left for a quid of baccy.'

" 'If that's all,' says he; 'there's help for that. I don't chew myself, and I ain't a rich man; I've a wife and children, and want every cent I've got, but it's one's duty to help a countryman. You shall have money for tobacco and a dram.'

"And so sayin', he took a purse out of his pocket, in which he carried his change. It was pretty full; there may have been some twenty dollars in it; and as he drew the string, it was as if the devil laughed and nodded to me out of the openin' of the purse.

" 'Halves!' cried I.

" 'No, not that,' says he; 'I've a wife and child, and what I have belongs to them; but half a dollar'——

" 'Halves!' cried I again; 'or else'——

" 'Or else?' repeated he: and, as he spoke, he put the purse back into his pocket, and laid hold of the rifle which was slung on his shoulder.

" 'Don't force one to do you a mischief,' said he. 'Don't,' says he; 'we might both be sorry for it. What you're thinkin' of brings no blessin'.'

"I was past seein' or hearin'. A thousand devils from hell were possessin' me.

" 'Halves!' I yelled out; and, as I said the word, he sprang out of the saddle, and fell back over his horse's crupper to the ground.

" 'I'm a dead man!' cried he; as well as the rattle in his throat would let him. 'God be merciful to me! My poor wife, my poor children!'

Bob paused; he gasped for breath, and the sweat stood in large drops upon his forehead. He gazed wildly round the room. The judge himself looked very pale. I tried to rise, but sank back in my chair. Without the table I believe I should have fallen to the ground.

There was a gloomy pause of some moments' duration. At last the judge broke silence.

"A hard, hard case!" said he. "Father, mother, children, all at one blow. Bob, you are a bad fellow—a very bad fellow—a great villain!"

"A great villain," groaned Bob. "The ball was gone right through his breast."

"Perhaps your gun went off by accident," said the judge, anxiously. "Perhaps it was his own ball."

Bob shook his head.

"I see him now, judge, as plain as can be, when he said, 'Don't force me to do you a mischief. We might both be sorry for it.' But I pulled the trigger. His bullet is still in his rifle.

"When I saw him lie dead before me, I can't tell you what I felt. It warn't the first I had sent to his account; but yet I would have given all the purses and money in the world to have had him alive again. I must have dragged him under the Patriarch, and dug a grave with my hunting knife; for I found him there afterwards."

"You found him there?" repeated the judge.

"Yes. I don't know how he came there. I must have brought him, but I recollect nothin' about it."

The judge had risen from his chair, and was walking up and down the room, apparently in deep thought. Suddenly he stopped short.

"What have you done with his money?"

"I took his purse, but buried his belt with him, as well as a flask of rum and some bread and beef he had brought away from Johnny's. I set out for San Felipe, and rode the whole day. In the evinin', when I looked about me, expectin' to see the town, where do you think I was?"

The judge and I stared at him.

"Under the Patriarch. The ghost of the murdered man had driven me there. I had no peace till I'd dug him up and buried him again. Next day I set off in another direction. I was out of tobacco, and I started across the prairie to Anahuac. Lord, what a day I passed! Wherever I went, *he* stood before me. If I turned, *he* turned too. Sometimes he came behind me, and looked over my shoulder. I spurred my mustang till the blood came, hopin' to get away from him, but it was all no use. I thought when I got to Anahuac I should be quit of him, and I galloped on as if for life or death. But in the evenin', instead of bein' close to the salt-works as I expected, there I was again, under the Patriarch. I dug him up a second time, and sat and stared at him, and then buried him agin."

"Queer that," observed the judge.

"Ay, very queer!" said Bob mournfully. "But it's all no use. Nothin' does me any good. I sha'nt be better—I shall never have peace till I'm hung."

Bob evidently felt relieved now; he had in a manner passed sentence on himself. Strange as it may appear, I had a similar feeling, and could not help nodding my head approvingly. The judge alone preserved an unmoved countenance.

"Indeed!" said he, "indeed! You think you'll be no better till you're hung."

"Yes," answered Bob, with eager haste. "Hung on the same tree under which *he* lies buried."

"Well, if you will have it so, we'll see what can be done for you. We'll call a jury of the neighbors together to-morrow."

"Thank ye, squire," murmured Bob, visibly comforted by this promise.

"We'll summon a jury," repeated the Alcalde, "and see what can be done for you. You'll perhaps have changed your mind by that time."

I stared at him like one fallen from the clouds, but he did not seem to notice my surprise.

"There is, perhaps, another way to get rid of your life, if you are tired of it," he continued. "We might, perhaps, hit upon one that would satisfy your conscience."

Bob shook his head. I involuntarily made the same movement.

"At any rate, we'll hear what the neighbors say," added the judge.

Bob stepped up to the judge, and held out his hand to bid him farewell. The other did not take it, and turning to me, said—"You had better stop here, I think"

Bob turned round impetuously.

"The gentleman must come with me."

"Why must he?" said the judge.

"Ask himself"

I again explained the obligation I was under to Bob; how we had fallen in with one another; and what care and attention he had shown me at Johnny's.

The judge nodded approvingly. "Nevertheless," said he, "you will remain here, and Bob will go alone. You are in a state of mind, Bob, in which a man is better alone, d'ye see; and so leave the young man here. Another misfortune might happen; and, at any rate, he's better here than at Johnny's. Come back to-morrow, and we'll see what can be done for you."

These words were spoken in a decided manner, which seemed to have its effect upon Bob. He nodded assentingly, and left the room. I remained staring at the judge, and lost in wonder at these strange proceedings.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRIAL BY A TEXIAN JURY.

WHEN Bob was gone, the Alealde gave a blast on a shell, which supplied the place of a bell. Then seizing the eigar box, he tried one eigar after another, broke them peevisly up, and threw the pieces out of the window. The negro whom the shell had summoned, stood for some time waiting, while his master broke up the cigars, and threw them away. At last the judge's patience seemed quite to leave him.

"Hark ye, Ptoly!" growled he to the frightened black, "the next time you bring me cigars that neither draw nor smoke, I'll make your back smoke for it. Mind that, now;—there's not a single one of them worth a rotten maize stalk. Tell that old coffee-colored hag of Johnny's, that I'll have no more of her cigars. Ride over to Mr. Dueie's and fetch a box. And, d'ye hear? Tell him I want to speak a word with him and the neighbors. Ask him to bring the neighbors with him to-morrow morning. And mind you're home again by two o'loek. Take the mustang we caught last week. I want to see how he goes."

The negro listened to these various commands with open mouth and staring eyes, then giving a perplexed look at his master, shot out of the room.

"Where away, Ptoly?" shouted the Alcalde after him.

"To Massa Dueie."

"Without a pass, Ptoly? And what are you going to say to Mr. Dueie?"

"Him nebber send bad cigar again, him coffee-cullud hag.

Massa speak to Johnny and neighbors. Johnny bring neighbors here."

"I thought as much," said the judge with perfect equanimity. "Wait a minute, I'll write the pass, and a couple of lines for Mr. Ducie."

This was soon done, and the negro dispatched on his errand. The judge waited till he heard the sound of his horse's feet galloping away, and then, laying hold of the box of despised cigars, lit the first which came to hand. It smoked capitally, as did the one that I took. They were *Principes*, and as good as I ever tasted.

I passed the whole of that day *tête-à-tête* with the judge, who I soon found, knew various friends of mine in the States. I told him the circumstances under which I had come to Texas, and the intention I had of settling there, should I find the country to my liking. During our long conversation, I was able to form a very different, and much more favorable estimate of his character, than I had done from his interview with Bob. He was the very man to be useful to a new country; of great energy, sound judgment, enlarged and liberal views. He gave me some curious information as to the state of things in Texas; and did not think it necessary to conceal from me, as an American, and one who intended settling in the country, that there was a plan in agitation for throwing off the Mexican yoke, and declaring Texas an independent republic. The high-spirited, and, for the most part, intelligent emigrants from the United States, who formed a very large majority of the population of Texas, saw themselves, with no very patient feeling, under the rule of a people both morally and physically inferior to themselves. They looked with contempt, and justly so, on the bigoted, idle, and ignorant Mexicans, while the difference of religion, and interference of the priests, served to increase the dislike between the Spanish and Anglo-American races.

Although the project was as yet not quite ripe for execution, it was discussed freely and openly by the American settlers. "It is the interest of every man to keep it secret," said the judge; and there can be nothing to induce even the worst amongst us to

betray a cause, by the success of which he is sure to profit. We have many bad characters in Texas, the offscourings of the United States, men like Bob, or far worse than him; but debauched, gambling, drunken villains though they be, they are the men we want when it comes to a struggle; and when that time arrives, they will all be found ready to put their shoulders to the wheel, use knife and rifle, and shed the last drop of their blood in defence of their fellow citizens, and of the new and independent republic of Texas. At this moment we must wink at many things which would be severely punished in an older and more settled country; each man's arm is of immense value to the State; for, on the day of battle, we shall have, not two to one, but twenty to one opposed to us."

I was awakened the following morning by the sound of a horse's feet; and, looking out of the window, saw Bob dismounting from his mustang. The last twenty-four hours had told fearfully upon him. His limbs seemed powerless, and he reeled and staggered in such a manner, that I at first thought him intoxicated. But such was not the case. His was the deadly weariness caused by mental anguish. He looked like one just taken from the rack.

Hastily pulling on my clothes, I hurried down stairs, and opened the house door. Bob stood with his head resting on his horse's neck, and his hands crossed, shivering and groaning. When I spoke to him, he looked up, but did not seem to know me. I tied his horse to a post, and taking his hand led him into the house. He followed like a child, apparently without the will or the power to resist; and when I placed him in a chair, he fell into it with a weight that made it crack under him, and shook the house. I could not get him to speak, and was about to return to my room to complete my toilet, when I again heard the tramp of mustangs. This was a party of half a dozen horsemen, all dressed in hunting shirts over buckskin breeches and jackets, and armed with rifles and bowie-knives; stout, daring-looking fellows, evidently from the south-western States, with the true Kentucky half-horse half-alligator profile, and the usual allowance of thunder, lightning, and earthquake. It struck me when I saw them, that two or three thousand such men would have small difficulty

in dealing with a whole army of Mexicans, if the latter were all of the pigmy, spindle-shanked breed I had seen on first landing. These giants could easily have walked away with a Mexican in each hand.

They jumped off their horses, and threw the bridles to the negroes in the usual Kentuckian devil-may-care style, and then walked into the house with the air of people who make themselves at home everywhere, and who knew themselves to be more masters in Texas than the Mexicans themselves. On entering the parlor they nodded a "good morning" to me, rather coldly to be sure, for they had seen me talking to Bob, which probably did not much recommend me. Presently four more horsemen rode up, and then a third party, so that there were now fourteen of them assembled, all-decided looking men, in the prime of life and strength. The judge, who slept in an adjoining room, had been awakened by the noise. I heard him jump out of bed, and not three minutes elapsed before he had entered the parlor.

After he had shaken hands with all his visitors, he presented me to them, and I found that I was in the presence of no less important persons than the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin; and that two of my worthy countrymen were corregidores, one a procurador, and the others *buenos hombres*, or freeholders. They did not seem, however, to prize their titles much, for they addressed one another by their surnames only.

The negro brought a light, opened the cigar box, and arranged the chairs; the judge pointed to the sideboard and to the cigars, and then sat down. Some took a dram, others lit a cigar.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the men sat in perfect silence, as if they were collecting their thoughts, or, as though it were undignified to show any haste or impatience to speak. This grave sort of deliberation which is met with among certain classes, and in certain provinces of the Union, has often struck me as a curious feature of our national character. It partakes of the stoical dignity of the Indian at his council fire, and of the stern, religious gravity of the early puritan settlers in America.

During this pause Bob was writhing on his chair, like a worm, his face concealed by his hands, his elbows on his knees. At

last, when all had drank and smoked, the judge laid down his cigar.

"Men!" said he.

"Squire!" answered they.

"We've a business before us, which I calculate will be best explained by him whom it concerns."

The men looked at the squire, then at Bob, then at me.

"Bob Rock! or whatever your name may be, if you have aught to say, say it!" continued the judge.

"Said it all yesterday," muttered Bob, his face still covered by his hands.

"Yes, but you must say it again to-day. Yesterday was Sunday, and Sunday is a day of rest and not of business. I will neither judge you, nor allow you to be judged by what you said yesterday. Besides, it was all between ourselves, for I don't reckon Mr. ——— as anything; I count him still as a stranger."

"What's the use of so much palaver, when the thing's plain enough?" said Bob, peevishly, raising his head as he spoke.

The men stared at him in grave astonishment. He was really frightful to behold; his face of a sort of blue tint; his cheeks hollow; his beard wild and ragged; his blood-shot eyes rolling and deep sunk in their sockets. His appearance was scarcely human.

"I tell you again," said the judge, "I will condemn no man upon his own word alone; much less you, who have been in my service, and eaten of my bread. You accused yourself yesterday, but you were delirious at the time—you had the fever upon you."

"It's no use, squire," said Bob, apparently touched by the kindness of the judge. "You mean well, I see; but though you might deliver me out of men's hands, you couldn't rescue me from myself. It's no use—I must be hung—hung on the same tree under which the man I killed lies buried."

The men, or the jurors, as I may call them, looked at one another, but said nothing.

"It's no use," again cried Bob, in a shrill, agonized tone. "If he had attacked me, or only threatened me; but no, he didn't do it. I hear his words still, when he said, 'Do it not, man! I've a

wife and child. What you intend brings no blessin' on the doer.' But I heard nothin' then except the voice of the devil; I brought the rifle down—levelled—fired."

The man's agony was so intense, that even the iron-featured jury seemed moved by it. They cast sharp, but stolen glances at Bob. There was a short silence.

"So you have killed a man?" said a deep, bass voice, at last.

"Ay, that have I!" gasped Bob.

"And how came that?" continued his questioner.

"How it came? You must ask the devil or Johnny. No, not Johnny, he can tell you nothing; he was not there. No one can tell you but me; and I hardly know how it was. The man was at Johnny's, and Johnny showed me his belt full of money."

"Johnny!" exclaimed several of the jury.

"Ay, Johnny! He reckoned on winning it from him, but the man was too cautious for that; and when Johnny had plucked all my feathers, won my twenty dollars fifty——"

"Twenty dollars fifty cents," interposed the judge, "which I paid him for catching mustangs and shooting game."

The men nodded.

"And then because he wouldn't play, you shot him?" asked the same deep-toned voice as before.

"No—some hours after—by the Jacinto, near the Patriarch—met him there, and killed him."

"Thought there was something out o' the common thereaway," said one of the jury; "for as we rode by the tree a whole nation of kites and turkey buzzards flew out. Didn't they, Mr. Hart?"

Mr. Hart nodded.

"Met him by the river, and cried halves of his money," continued Bob mechanically. "He said he'd give me something to buy a quid, and more than enough for that, but not halves. 'I've a wife and child,' said he——"

"And you?" asked the juror with the deep voice, which this time, however, had a hollow sound in it.

"Shot him down," said Bob, with a wild, hoarse laugh.

For some time no word was spoken.

"And who was the man?" said a juror at last.

"Didn't ask him; and it warn't written on his face. He was from the States; but whether a hoosier, or a buckeye, or a mud-head, is more than I can say."

"The thing must be investigated, Alcalde," said another of the jury after a second pause.

"It must so," said the Alcalde.

"What's the good of so much investigation?" grumbled Bob.

"What good?" repeated the Alcalde. "Because we owe it to ourselves, to the dead man, and to you, not to sentence you without having held an inquest on the body. There's another thing which I must call your attention to," continued he, turning to the jury; "the man is half out of his mind—*non compos mentis* as they say. He's got the fever, and had it when he did the deed; he was urged on by Johnny, and maddened by his losses at play. In spite of his wild excitement, however, he saved that gentleman's life yonder, Mr. ———."

"Did he so?" said one of the jury.

"That did he," replied I, "not only by saving me from drowning when my horse dragged me, half dead and helpless, into the river, but also by the care and attention he forced Johnny and his mulatto to bestow upon me. Without him I should not be alive at this moment."

Bob gave me a look which went to my heart. The tears were standing in his eyes. The jury heard me in deep silence.

"It seems that Johnny led you on and excited you to this?" said one of the jurors.

"I didn't say that. I only said that he pointed to the man's money bag, and said——But what is it to you what Johnny said? I'm the man who did it. I speak for myself, and I'll be hanged for myself."

"All very good, Bob," interposed the Alcalde; "but we can't hang you without being sure you deserve it. What do you say to it, Mr. Whyte? You are the proeurador—and you, Mr. Hart and Mr. Stone? Help yourselves to rum or brandy; and Mr. Bright and Irwin, take another cigar. They're considerable tolerable the cigars—ain't they? That's brandy, Mr. Whyte, in the diamond bottle."

Mr. Whyte had got up to give his opinion, as I thought ; but I was mistaken. He stepped to the sideboard, took up a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other, every movement being performed with the greatest deliberation.

" Well, squire," said he, " or rather *Alcalde*——"

After the word *Alcalde*, he filled the glass half full of rum.

" If it's as we've heard," added he, pouring about a spoonful of water on the rum, " and Bob has killed the man"—he continued, throwing in some lumps of sugar—" murdered him," he went on crushing the sugar with a wooden stamp—" I rather calculate"—here he raised the glass—" Bob ought to be hung," he concluded, putting the tumbler to his mouth and emptying it.

The jurors nodded in silence. Bob drew a deep breath, as if a load were taken off his breast.

" Well," said the judge, who did not look over well pleased ; " if you all think so, and Bob is agreed, I calculate we must do as he wishes. I tell you, though, I don't do it willingly. At any rate we must find the dead man first, and examine Johnny. We owe that to ourselves and to Bob."

" Certainly," said the jury with one voice.

" You are a dreadful murderer, Bob, a very considerable one," continued the judge, " but I tell you to your face, and not to flatter you, there is more good in your little finger than in Johnny's whole hide. And I'm sorry for you, because, at the bottom, you are not a bad man, though you've been led away by bad company and example. I calculate you might still be reformed, and made very useful—more so, perhaps, than you think. Your rifle's a capital good one."

At these last words the men all looked up, and threw a keen, inquiring glance at Bob.

" You might be of great service," continued the judge encouragingly, " to the country and to your fellow-citizens. You're worth a dozen Mexicans any day."

While the judge was speaking, Bob let his head fall on his breast, and seemed reflecting. He now looked up.

" I understand, squire ; I see what you're drivin' at. But I can't do it—I can't wait so long. My life's a burthen and a suf-

ferin' to me. Wherever I go, by day or by night, he's always there, standin' before me, and drivin' me under the Patriarch."

There was a pause of some duration. The judge resumed.

"So be it, then," said he, with a sort of suppressed sigh. We'll see the body to-day, Bob, and you may come to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"Couldn't it be sooner?" asked Bob, impatiently.

"Why sooner? Are you in such a hurry?" asked Mr. Heart.

"What's the use of palaverin'?" said Bob, sulkily. "I told you already, I'm sick of my life. If you don't come till ten o'clock, by the time you've had your talk out and ridden to the Patriarch, the fever'll be upon me."

"But we can't be flying about like a parcel of wild geese because of your fever," said the procurador.

"Certainly not," said Bob, humbly.

"It's an ugly customer, the fever, though, Mr. Whyte," observed Mr. Trace; "and I calculate we ought to do him some pleasure. What do you think, squire?"

"I reckon he's rather indiscreet in his askin's," said the judge, in a tone of vexation. "However, as he wishes it, and if it is agreeable to you," added he, turning to the Ayuntamiento, "and as it's you, Bob, I calculate we must do what you ask."

"Thankee," said Bob.

"Nothing to thank for," growled the judge. "And now go into the kitchen and get a good meal of roast beef, d'ye hear?" He knocked upon the table. "Some good roast beef for Bob," said he to a negress who entered, "and see that he eats it. And get yourself dressed more decently, Bob—like a white man and a Christian, not like a wild redskin."

The negress and Bob left the room. The conversation now turned upon Johnny, who appeared, from all accounts, to be a very bad and dangerous fellow; and after a short discussion, they agreed to lynch him, (in backwoodsman's phrase,) just as coolly as if they had been talking of catching a mustang. When the men had come to this satisfactory conclusion, they got up, drank the judge's health and mine, shook us by the hand, and left the room and the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EXECUTION.

THE day passed more heavily than the preceding one. I was too much engrossed with the strange scene I had witnessed to talk much. The judge, too, was in a very bad humor. He was vexed that a man should be hung who might render the country much and good service if he remained alive. That Johnny, the miserable, cowardly, treacherous Johnny, should be sent out of the world as quickly as possible, was perfectly correct, but with Bob it was very different. In vain did I remind him of the crime of which Bob had been guilty—of the outraged laws of God and man—and of the atonement due. It was no use. If Bob had sinned against society, he could repair his fault much better by remaining alive than by being hung; and, for anything else, God would avenge it in his own good time. We parted for the night, neither of us convinced by the other's arguments.

We were sitting at breakfast the next morning, when a man, dressed in black, rode up to the door. It was Bob, but so metamorphosed that I scarcely knew him. Instead of the torn and bloodstained handkerchief round his head, he wore a hat; instead of the leathern jacket, a decent cloth coat. He had shaved off his beard, too, and looked quite another man. His manner had altered with his dress; he seemed tranquil and resigned. With a mild and submissive look, he held out his hand to the judge, who took and shook it heartily.

"Ah, Bob," said he, "if you had only listened to what I so often told you! I had those clothes brought on purpose from

New Orleans, in order that, on Sundays at least, you might look like a decent and respectable man. How often have I asked you to put them on, and come with us to meeting, to hear Mr. Bliss preach! There is some truth in the saying, that the coat makes the man. With his Sunday coat, a man often puts on other and better thoughts. If that had been your case only fifty-two times in the year, you'd have learned to avoid Johnny before now."

Bob said nothing.

"Well, well! I've done all I could to make a better man of you. All that was in my power."

"That you have," answered Bob, much moved. "God reward you for it."

I could not help holding out my hand to the worthy judge; and as I did so, I thought I saw a moistness in his eye, which he suppressed, however, and, turning to the breakfast table, bade us sit down. Bob thanked him humbly, but declined, saying that he wished to appear fasting before his offended Creator. The judge insisted, and reasoned with him, and at last he took a chair.

Before we had done breakfast, our friends of the preceding day began to drop in, and some of them joined us at the meal. When they had all taken what they chose, the judge ordered the negroes to clear away, and leave the room. This done, he seated himself at the upper end of the table, with the Ayuntamiento on either side, and Bob facing him.

"Mr. Whyte," said the Alcalde, "have you, as procurado, anything to state?"

"Yes, Alcalde," replied the procurado. "In virtue of my office, I made a search in the place mentioned by Bob Rock, and there found the body of a man who had met his death by a gunshot wound. I also found a belt full of money, and several letters of recommendation to different planters, from which it appears that the man was on his way from Illinois to San Felipe, in order to buy land of Colonel Austin, and to settle in Texas."

The procurado then produced a pair of saddlebags, out of which he took a leathern belt stuffed with money, which he laid on the table, together with the letters. The judge opened the belt, and

counted the money. It amounted to upwards of five hundred dollars, in gold and silver. The procurador then read the letters.

One of the corregidores now announseed that Johnny and his mulatto had left their house and fled. He, the corregidor, had sent people in pursuit of them ; but as yet there were no tidings of their capture. This piece of intelligence seemed to vex the judge greatly, but he made no remark on it at the time.

" Bob Rock !" cried he.

Bob stepped forward.

" Bob Roek, or by whatever name you may be known, are you guilty or not guilty of this man's death ?"

" Guilty !" replied Bob, in a low tone.

" Gentlemen of the jury, will you be pleased to give your verdict ?"

The jury left the room. In ten minutes they returned.

" Guilty !" said the foreman.

" Bob Rock," said the judge solemnly, " your fellow-citizens have found you guilty ; and I pronounsee the sentence—that you be hung by the neek until you are dead. The Lord be merciful to your soul !"

" Amen !" said all present.

" Thank ye," murmured Bob.

" We will seal up the property of the deceased," said the judge, " and then proceed to our painful duty."

He called for a light, and he and the procurador and corregidores sealed up the papers and the money.

" Has any one aught to allege why the sentence should not be put in exeecution ?" said the Alcalde, with a glance at me.

" He saved my life, judge and fellow-citizens," cried I, deeply moved.

Bob shook his head mournfully.

" Let us go, then, in God's name," said the judge.

Without another word being spoken, we left the house and mounted our horses. The judge had brought a Bible with him ; and he rode on, a little in front, with Bob, doing his best to prepare him for the eternity to which he was hastening. Bob list-

ened attentively for some time; but at last he seemed to get impatient, and pushed his mustang into so fast a trot, that for a moment we suspected him of wishing to escape the doom he had so eagerly sought. But it was only that he feared the fever might return before the expiration of the short time he had to live.

After an hour's ride, we came to the enormous live oak distinguished as *the Patriarch*. Two or three of the men dismounted, and held aside the moss-covered branches which swept the ground, and formed a complete curtain round the tree. The party, rode through the opening thus made, and drew up in a circle beneath the huge leafy dome. In the centre of this ring stood Bob, trembling like an aspen-leaf, and with his eyes fixed on a small mound of fresh earth, partly concealed by the branches, and which had escaped my notice on my former visit to the tree. It was the grave of the murdered man.

A magnificent burial place was that: no poet could have dreamt or desired a better. Above, the huge vault, with its natural frettings and arches; below, the greenest, freshest grass; around, an eternal half light, streaked and varied, and radiant as a rainbow. It was imposingly beautiful.

Bob, the judge, and the corregidors, remained sitting on their horses, but several of the other men dismounted. One of the latter cut the lasso from Bob's saddle, and threw an end of it over one of the lowermost branches; then uniting the two ends, formed them into a strong noose, which he left dangling from the bough. This simple preparation completed, the Alcalde took off his hat and folded his hands. The others followed his example.

"Bob!" said the judge to the unfortunate criminal, whose head was bowed on his horse's mane; "Bob! we will pray for your poor soul, which is about to part from your sinful body."

Bob raised his head. "I had something to say," exclaimed he in a wondering and husky tone. "Something I wanted to say."

"What have you to say?"

Bob stared around him; his lips moved, but no word escaped him. His spirit was evidently no longer with things of this earth.

"Bob!" said the judge again, "we will pray for your soul."

"Pray! pray!" groaned he. "I shall need it."

In slow and solemn accents, and with great feeling, the judge uttered the Lord's Prayer. Bob repeated every word after him. When it was ended—

"God be merciful to your soul!" exclaimed the judge.

"Amen!" said all present.

One of the corregidors now passed the noose of the lasso round Bob's neck, another bound his eyes, a third person drew his feet out of the stirrups, while a fourth stepped behind his horse with a heavy riding-whip. All was done in the deepest silence; not a word was breathed; not a footfall heard on the soft, yielding turf. There was something awful and oppressive in the profound stillness that reigned in the vast enclosure.

The whip fell. The horse gave a spring forwards. At the same moment Bob made a desperate clutch at the bridle, and a loud hold "Hold!" burst in thrilling tones from the lips of the judge.

It was too late; Bob was already hanging. The judge pushed forward, nearly riding down the man who held the whip, and seizing Bob in his arms, raised him on his own horse, supporting him with one hand, while with the other he strove to unfasten the noose. His whole gigantic frame trembled with eagerness and exertion. The procurador, corregidors, all, in short, stood in open-mouthed wonder at this strange proceeding.

"Whisky! whisky! Has nobody any whisky?" shouted the judge.

One of the men sprang forward with a whisky-flask, another supported the body, and a third the feet of the half-hanged man, while the judge poured a few drops of spirits into his mouth. The cravat, which had not been taken off, had hindered the breaking of the neck. At last Bob opened his eyes, and gazed vacantly around him.

"Bob," said the judge, "you had something to say, hadn't you, about Johnny?"

"Johnny," gasped Bob; "Johnny."

"What's become of him?"

"He's gone to San Antonio, Johnny."

"To San Antonio!" repeated the judge, with an expression of great alarm overspreading his features.

"To San Antonio—to Padre José," continued Bob; "a Catholic. Beware!"

"Catholic!" exclaimed the judge. The words he had heard seemed to deprive him of all strength. His arms fell slowly and gradually by his side, and Bob was again hanging from the lasso.

"A Catholic! a traitor!" repeated several of the men; "a citizen and a traitor!"

"So it is, men!" exclaimed the judge. We've no time to lose," continued he, in a harsh, hurried voice; "no time to lose; we must catch him."

"That must we," said several voices, "or our plans are betrayed to the Mexicans."

"After him immediately to San Antonio!" cried the judge, with the same desperately hurried manner.

"To San Antonio!" repeated the men, pushing their way through the curtain of moss and branches. As soon as they were outside, those who were dismounted sprang into the saddle, and, without another word, the whole party galloped away in the direction of San Antonio.

The judge alone remained, seemingly lost in thought; his countenance pale and anxious, and his eyes following the riders. His reverie, however, had lasted but a very few seconds, when he seized my arm.

"Hasten to my house," quoth he; "lose no time, don't spare horse-flesh. Take Ptoly and a fresh beast; hurry over to San Felipe, and tell Stephen Austin what has happened, and what you have seen and heard.

"Off with you at once, if you would do Texas a service. Bring my wife and daughter back."

And so saying, he literally drove me from under the tree, pushing me out with his hands and feet. I was so startled at the expression of violent impatience and anxiety which his features assumed, that, without venturing to make further objection I struck the spurs into my mustang and galloped off.

I rode full speed to the judge's house, and thence on a fresh horse to San Felipe, where I found Colonel Austin, who seemed much alarmed at the news I brought him, had horses saddled, and sent round to all the neighbors. Before the wife and step-daughter of the judge had made their preparations to accompany me home, he started with fifty armed men to San Antonio.

I escorted the ladies to their house, but scarcely had we arrived there, when I was seized with a fever, the result of my recent fatigues and sufferings. For some days my life was in danger, but at last a good constitution, and the kindest and most watchful nursing, triumphed over the disease. As soon as I was able to mount a horse, I set out for Mr. Neal's plantation, in company with his huntsman, Anthony, who, after spending many days, and riding over many hundreds of miles of ground in quest of me, had at last found me out.

Our way led up past the Patriarch, and, as we approached it, we saw innumerable birds of prey, and carrion crows circling round it, croaking and screaming. I turned my eyes in another direction; but, nevertheless, I felt a strange sort of longing to revisit the tree. Anthony had ridden on, and was already hidden from view behind its branches. Presently I heard him give a loud shout of exultation. I jumped off my horse, and led it through a small opening in the leafage.

Some forty paces from me the body of a man was hanging by a lasso from the very same branch on which Bob had been hung. It was not Bob, however, for the corpse was much too short and small for him.

I drew nearer. "Johnny!" I exclaimed. "That's Johnny!"

"It *was*," answered Anthony. "Thank Heaven, there's an end of him!"

I shuddered. "But where is Bob?"

"Bob?" cried Anthony. "Bob!"

He glanced towards the grave. The mound of earth seemed to me larger and higher than when I had last seen it. Doubtless the murderer lay beside his victim.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ATTACK—THE REPULSE.

I HAD been but three or four months in Texas, when, in consequence of the oppressive conduct of the Mexican military authorities, symptoms of discontent showed themselves, and several skirmishes occurred between the American settlers and the soldiery. The two small forts of Velasco and Nacogdoches were taken by the former, and their garrisons and a couple of field-officers made prisoners; soon after which, however, the quarrel was made up by the intervention of Col. Austin on the part of Texas, and Col. Mejia on the part of the Mexican authorities.

But in the year '33 occurred Santa Anna's defection from the liberal party, and the imprisonment of Stephen F. Austin, the Texan representative in the Mexican congress, by the vice-president, Gomez Farias. This was followed by Texas adopting the constitution of 1824, and declaring itself an independent state of the Mexican republic. Finally, toward the close of 1835, Texas threw off the Mexican yoke altogether, voted itself a free and sovereign republic, and prepared to defend by arms its newly asserted liberty.

The first step to be taken was to secure our communications with the United States by getting possession of the sea-ports. Gen. Cos had occupied Galveston harbor, and built and garrisoned a block-fort, nominally for the purpose of enforcing the customs laws, but in reality with a view to cut off our communications with New Orleans and the States. This fort it was necessary to get possession of, and my friend Fanning and myself were appointed to that

duty by the Alcalde, who had taken a prominent part in all that had occurred.

Our whole force and equipment wherewith to accomplish this enterprise, consisted in a sealed despatch, to be opened at the town of Columbia, and a half-breed, named Agostino who acted as our guide. On reaching Columbia, we called together the principal inhabitants of the place, and of the neighboring towns of Bolivar and Marion, unsealed the letter in their presence, and six hours afterwards the forces therein specified were assembled, and we were on our march toward Galveston. The next day the fort was taken, and the garrison made prisoners without our losing a single man.

We sent off our guide to the government at San Felipe with news of our success. In nine days he returned, bringing us the thanks of Congress, and fresh orders. We were to leave a garrison in the fort, and then ascend Trinity River, and march toward San Antonio de Bexar. This route was all the more agreeable to Fanning and myself, as it would bring us into the immediate vicinity of the *haciendas*, or estates, of which we had some time previously obtained a grant from the Texan government; and we did not doubt that we were indebted to our friend the Alcalde for the orders which thus conciliated our private convenience with our public duty.

As we marched along we found the whole country in commotion, the settlers all arming, and hastening to the distant place of rendezvous. We arrived at Trinity River one afternoon, and immediately sent messengers for forty miles in all directions to summon the inhabitants. At the period in question, the plantations in that part of the country were very few and far between, but nevertheless by the afternoon of the next day we had got together four-and-thirty men, mounted on mustangs, each equipped with rifle and bowie-knife, powder-horn and bullet-bag, and furnished with provisions for several days. With these we started for San Antonio de Bexar, a march of two hundred and fifty miles, through trackless prairies intersected with rivers and streams, which, although not quite so big as the Mississippi or Potomac, were yet deep and wide enough to have offered serious impediment to

regular armies. But to Texan farmers and backwoods-men, they were trifling obstacles. Those we could not wade through we swam over; and in due time, and without any incident worthy of note, reached the appointed place of rendezvous, which was on the river Salado, about fifteen miles from San Antonio, the principal city of the province. This latter place it was intended to attack—an enterprise of some boldness and risk, considering that the town was protected by a strong fort, amply provided with heavy artillery, and had a garrison of nearly three thousand men, commanded by officers who had, for the most part, distinguished themselves in the revolutionary wars against the Spaniards. Our whole army, which we found encamped on the Salado, under the command of General Austin, did not exceed eight hundred men.

The day after that on which Fanning and myself, with our four and thirty recruits, reached headquarters, a council of war was held, and it was resolved to advance as far as the mission of Santa Espada. The advanced guard was to push forward immediately; the main body would follow the next day. Fanning and myself were appointed to the command of the vanguard, in conjunction with Mr. Wharton, a wealthy planter, who had brought a strong party of volunteers with him, and whose mature age and cool judgment, it was thought, would counterbalance any excess of youthful heat and impetuosity on our part. Selecting ninety-two men out of the eight hundred, who, to a man, volunteered to accompany us, we set out for the mission.

These missions are a sort of picket-houses or outposts of the Catholic church, and are found in great numbers in all the frontier provinces of Spanish America, especially in Texas, Santa Fe, and Cohahuila. They are usually of sufficient strength to afford their inmates security against any predatory party of Indians or other marauders, and are occupied by priests, who, while using their endeavors to spread the doctrines of the church of Rome, act also as spies and agents of the Mexican government.

On reaching San Espada we held a consultation as to the propriety of remaining there until the general came up, or of advancing at once toward the river. Wharton inclined to the former plan, and it was certainly the most prudent, for the mission was

a strong building, surrounded by a high wall, and might have been held against very superior numbers. Fanning and I, however, did not like the idea of being cooped up in a house, and at last Wharton yielded. We left our horses and mustangs in the charge of eight men, and with the remainder set out in the direction of the Salado, which flows from north to south, a third of a mile to the westward of the mission. About half-way between the latter and the river, was a small group, or island, of muskeet trees, the only object that broke the uniformity of the prairie. The bank of the river on our side was tolerably steep, about eight or ten feet high, hollowed out here and there, and covered with a thick network of wild vines. The Salado at this spot describes a sort of bow-shaped curve, with a ford at either end, by which alone the river can be passed, for although not very broad, it is rapid and deep. We resolved to take up a position within this bow, calculating that we might manage to defend the two ferds, which were not above a quarter of a mile apart.

At the same time we did not lose sight of the dangers of such a position, and of the almost certainty that if the enemy managed to cross the river, we should be surrounded and cut off. But our success on the few occasions on which we had hitherto come to blows with the Mexicans, at Velasco, at Nacogdoches, and Galveston, had inspired us with so much confidence, that we considered ourselves a match for thousands of such foes, and actually began to wish the enemy would attack us before our main body came up. We reconnoitred the ground, stationed a picket of twelve men at each ford, and an equal number in the island of muskeet trees; and established ourselves with the remainder among the vines and in the hollows on the river bank.

The commissariat department of the Texan army, was, as may be supposed, not yet placed upon any very regular footing. In fact, every man, was, for the present, his own commissary-general. Finding our stock of provisions to be very small, we sent out a party of foragers, who soon returned with three sheep which they had taken from a *rancho*, within a mile of San Antonio. An old priest, whom they found there, had threatened them with the anger of Heaven and of General Cos; but they paid little atten-

tion to his denunciations, and, throwing down three dollars, walked off with the sheep. The priest became furious, got upon his mule, and trotted away in the direction of the city to complain to Gen. Cos of the misconduct of the heretics.

After this we made no doubt that we should soon have a visit from the worthy Dons. Nevertheless the evening and the night passed away without incident. Day broke—still no signs of the Mexicans. This treacherous sort of calm, we thought, might forebode a storm, and we did not allow it to lull us into security. We let the men get their breakfast, which they had hardly finished, when the picket from the outer ford came in with news that a strong body of cavalry was approaching the river, and that their vanguard was already in the hollow way leading to the ford. We had scarcely received this intelligence when we heard the blare of the trumpets, and the next moment we saw the officers push their horses up the declivitous bank, closely followed by their men, whom they formed up in the prairie. We counted six small squadrons, about three hundred men in all. They were the Durango dragoons—smart troops enough to all appearance, capitally mounted and equipped, and armed with carbines and sabres.

Although the enemy had doubtless reconnoitered from the opposite shore, and ascertained our position, he could not form any accurate idea of our numbers, for with a view to deceive him, we kept the men in constant motion, sometimes showing a part of them on the prairie, then causing them to disappear again behind the vines and bushes. This was all very knowing for young soldiers such we were; but, on the other hand, we had committed a grievous error and sinned against all established military rules, by not placing a picket on the further side of the river, to warn us of the approach of the enemy, and the direction in which he was coming. There can be little doubt that if we had had earlier notice of their approach, thirty or forty good marksmen—and all our people were that—might not only have delayed the advance of the Mexicans, but perhaps even totally disgusted them of their attempt to cross the Salado. The hollow way on the other side of the river leading to the ford, was narrow and tolerably steep, and the bank at least six times as high as on our side. Nothing

would have been easier than to have stationed a party, so as to pick off the cavalry as they wound through this sort of pass, and emerged two by two upon the shore. Our error, however, did not strike us till it was too late to repair it; so we were fain to console ourselves with the reflection that the Mexicans would be much more likely to attribute our negligence to an excess of confidence in our resources, than to inexperience in military matters, which was its real cause. We resolved to do our best to merit the good opinion which we thus supposed them to entertain of us.

When the whole of the dragoons had crossed the water, they marched on for a short distance in an easterly direction; then, wheeling to the right, proceeded southward, until within some five hundred paces of us, where they halted. In this position the line of cavalry formed the chord of the arc described by the river, and occupied by us.

As soon as they halted, they opened their fire, although they could not see one of us, for we were completely sheltered by the bank. Our Mexican heroes, however, apparently did not think it necessary to be within sight or range of their opponents before firing, for they gave us a rattling volley at a distance which no carbine would carry. This done, others galloped on for about a hundred yards, halted again, loaded, fired another volley, and then giving another gallop, fired again. They continued this sort of *manège* till they found themselves within two hundred and fifty paces of us, and then appeared inclined to take a little time for reflection.

We kept ourselves perfectly still. The dragoons evidently did not like the aspect of matters. Our remaining concealed and not answering their fire, seemed to bother them. We saw the officers taking a deal of pains to encourage their men, and at last two squadrons advanced, the others following more slowly, a short distance in the rear. This was the moment we had waited for. No sooner had the dragoons got into a canter, than six of our men who had received orders to that effect, sprang up the bank, took steady aim at the officers, fired, and then jumped down again.

As we had expected, the small numbers that had shown them-

selves, encouraged the Mexicans to advance. They seemed at first taken rather aback by the fall of four of their officers; but, nevertheless, after a moment's hesitation, they came thundering along full speed. They were within sixty or seventy yards of us, when Fanning and thirty of our riflemen ascended the bank, and with a coolness and precision that would have done credit to the most veteran troops, poured a steady fire into the ranks of the dragoons.

It requires some nerve and courage for men who have never gone through any regular military training, to stand their ground singly and unprotected, within fifty yards of an advancing line of cavalry. Our fellows did it, however, and fired, not all at once, or in a hurry, but slowly and deliberately; a running fire, every shot of which told. Saddle after saddle was emptied; the men, as they had been ordered, always picking out the foremost horsemen, and as soon as they had fired, jumping down the bank to reload. When the whole of the thirty men had discharged their rifles, Wharton and myself, with the reserve of six-and-thirty more, took their places; but the dragoons had almost had enough already, and we had scarcely fired ten shots when they executed a right about turn, with an uniformity and rapidity which did infinite credit to their drill, and went off at a pace that soon carried them out of reach of our bullets. They had probably not expected so warm a reception. We saw their officers doing everything they could to check their flight, imploring, threatening, even cutting at them with their sabres, but it was of no use; if they were to be killed, it must be in their own way, and they preferred being cut down by their officers to encountering the deadly precision of rifles, in the hands of men who, being sure of hitting a squirrel at a hundred yards, were not likely to miss a Durango dragoon at any point within range.

Our object in ordering the men to fire slowly was, always to have thirty or forty rifles loaded, wherewith to receive the enemy should he attempt a charge *en masse*. But our first greeting had been a sickener, and it appeared almost doubtful whether he would venture to attack us again, although the officers did everything in their power to induce their men to advance. For a long

time, neither threats, entreaties, nor reproaches, produced any effect. We saw the officers gesticulating furiously, pointing to us with their sabres, and impatiently spurring their horses, till the fiery animals plunged and reared, and sprang with all four feet from the ground. It is only just to say, that the officers exhibited a degree of courage far beyond anything we had expected from them. Of the two squadrons that charged us, two-thirds of the officers had fallen; but those who remained, instead of appearing intimidated by their comrades' fate, redoubled their efforts to bring their men forward.

At last there appeared some probability of accomplishing this, after a most curious and truly Mexican fashion. Posting themselves in front of their squadrons, they rode on alone for a hundred yards or so, halted, looked round, as much as to say—"You see there is no danger as far as this," and then galloping back, led their men on. Each time that they executed this manœuvre, the dragoons would advance slowly some thirty or forty paces, and then halt as simultaneously as if the word of command had been given. Off went the officers again, some distance to the front, and then back again to their men, and got them on a little further. In this manner these heroes were inveigled once more to within a hundred and fifty yards of our position.

Of course, at each of the numerous halts which they made during their advance, they favored us with a general, but most innocuous discharge of their carbines; and at last, gaining confidence, I suppose, from our passiveness, and from the noise and smoke they themselves had been making, three squadrons which had not yet been under fire, formed open column, and advanced at a trot. Without giving them time to halt or reflect—"Forward! Charge!" shouted the officers, urging their own horses to their utmost speed; and, following the impulse thus given, the three squadrons came charging furiously along.

Up sprang thirty of our men to receive them. Their orders were to fire slowly, and not throw away a shot, but the gleaming sabres and rapid approach of the dragoons flurried some of them, and firing a hasty volley, they jumped down the bank again. This precipitation had nearly been fatal to us. Several of the

dragoons fell, and there was some confusion and a momentary faltering among the others; but they still came on. At this critical moment, Wharton and myself, with the reserve, showed ourselves on the bank. "Slow and sure—mark your men!" shouted we both. Wharton on the right and I on the left. The command was obeyed: rifle after rifle cracked off, always aimed at the foremost of the dragoons, and at every report a saddle was emptied. Before we had all fired, Fanning and a dozen of his sharpest men had again loaded, and were by our side. For nearly a minute the Mexicans remained, as if stupefied by our murderous fire, and uncertain whether to advance or retire; but as those who attempted the former were invariably shot down, they at last began a retreat, which was soon converted into a rout. We gave them a farewell volley, which eased a few more horses of their riders, and then got under cover again, to await what might next occur.

But the Mexican caballeros had no notion of coming up to the scratch a third time. They kept patrolling about some three or four hundred yards off, and firing volleys at us, which they were able to do with perfect impunity, as at that distance we did not think proper to return a shot.

The skirmish had lasted nearly three quarters of an hour. Strange to say, we had not had a single man wounded, although at times the bullets had fallen about us as thick as hail. We could not account for this. Many of us had been hit by the balls, but a bruise or a graze of the skin was the worst consequence that had ensued. We were in a fair way to deem ourselves invulnerable.

We were beginning to think that the fight was over for the day, when our videttes at the lower ford brought us the somewhat unpleasant intelligence that large masses of infantry were approaching the river, and would soon be in sight. The words were hardly uttered, when the roll of the drums and shrill squeak of the fifes became audible; and in a few minutes the head of the column of infantry, having crossed the ford, ascended the sloping bank, and defiled in the prairie opposite the island of muskeet trees. As company after company appeared, we were able to

form a pretty exact estimate of their numbers. There were two battalions, together about a thousand men; and they brought a field-piece with them.

These were certainly rather long odds to be opposed to seventy-two men and three officers; for it must be remembered that we had left twenty of our people at the mission and in the island of trees. Two battalions of infantry, and six squadrons of dragoons—the latter, to be sure, disheartened and diminished by the loss of some fifty men, but nevertheless formidable opponents, now they were supported by the foot soldiers. About twenty Mexicans to each of us. It was getting past a joke. We were all capital shots, and most of us, besides our rifles, had a brace of pistols in our belts; but what were seventy-five rifles, and five or six score of pistols against a thousand muskets and bayonets, two hundred and fifty dragoons, and a field piece loaded with canister? If the Mexicans had a spark of courage or soldiership about them, our fate was sealed. But it was exactly this courage and soldiership which we made sure would be wanting.

Nevertheless we, the officers, could not repress a feeling of anxiety and self-reproach, when we reflected that we had brought our comrades into such a hazardous predicament. But on looking around us, our apprehensions vanished. Nothing could exceed the perfect coolness and confidence with which the men were cleaning and preparing their rifles for the approaching conflict; no bravado—no boasting, talking, or laughing, but a calm decision of manner, which at once told us, that if it were possible to overcome such odds as were brought against us, those were the men to do it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

OUR arrangements for the approaching struggle were soon completed. Fanning and Wharton were to make head against the infantry and cavalry. I was to capture the field-piece—an eight-pounder.

This gun was placed by the Mexicans upon their extreme left, close to the river, the shores of which it commanded for a considerable distance. The bank on which we were posted was, as before mentioned, indented by caves and hollows, and covered with a thick tapestry of vines and other plants, which was now very useful in concealing us from the artillery-men. The latter made a pretty good guess at our position however, and at the first discharge, the canister whizzed past us at a very short distance. There was not a moment to lose, for one well-directed shot might exterminate half of us. Followed by a dozen men, I worked my way as well as I could through the labyrinth of vines and bushes, and was not more than fifty yards from the gun, when it was again fired. No one was hurt, although the shot was evidently intended for my party. The enemy could not see us; but the motion of the vines, as we passed through them, had betrayed our whereabouts: so, perceiving that we were discovered, I sprang up the bank into the prairie, followed by my men, to whom I shouted, above all to aim at the artillerymen.

I had raised my own rifle to my shoulder, when I let it fall again in astonishment at an apparition that presented itself to my view. This was a tall, lean, wild figure, with a face over-

grown by a long beard that hung down upon his breast, and dressed in a leather cap, jacket, and mocassins. Where this man had sprung from was a perfect riddle. He was unknown to any of us, although I had some vague recollection of having seen him before, but where or when, I could not call to mind. He had a long rifle in his hands, which he must have fired once already, for one of the artillerymen lay dead by the gun. At the moment I first caught sight of him, he shot down another, and then began reloading with a rapid dexterity, that proved him to be well used to the thing. My men were as much astonished as I was by this strange apparition, which appeared to have started out of the earth; and for a few seconds they forgot to fire, and stood gazing at the stranger. The latter did not seem to approve of their inaction.

“D—— yer eyes, yer starin’ fools,” shouted he, in a rough hoarse voice, “don’t ye see them art’lerymen? Why don’t ye, knock ’em on the head?”

It certainly was not the moment to remain idle. We fired; but our astonishment had thrown us off our balance, and we nearly all missed. We sprang down the bank again to load, just as the men serving the gun were slewing it round, so as to bring it to bear upon us. Before this was accomplished, we were under cover, and the stranger had the benefit of the discharge, of which he took no more notice than if he had borne a charmed life. Again we heard the crack of his rifle, and when, having reloaded, we once more ascended the bank, he was taking aim at the last artilleryman, who fell, as his companions had done.

“D—— ye, for laggin’ fellers!” growled the stranger. “Why don’t ye take that ’ere big gun?”

Our small numbers, the bad direction of our first volley, but, above all, the precipitation with which we had jumped down the bank after firing it, had so encouraged the enemy, that a company of infantry drawn up some distance in the rear of the field-piece, fired a volley and advanced at double-quick time, part of them making a small *détour* with the intention of cutting us off from our friends. At this moment, we saw Fanning and thirty men coming along the river bank to our assistance; so without mind-

ing the Mexicans who were getting behind us, we rushed forward to within twenty paces of those in our front, and taking steady aim, brought down every man his bird. The sort of desperate coolness with which this was done, produced the greater effect on our opponents, as being something quite out of their way. They would, perhaps, have stood firm against a volley from five times our number, at a rather greater distance; but they did not like having their mustaches singed by our powder; and after a moment's wavering and hesitation, they shouted out "Diabolus! Diabolus!" and throwing away their muskets, broke into a precipitate flight.

Fauning and Wharton now came up with all the men. Under cover of the infantry's advance, the gun had been re-manned, but, luckily for us, only by infantry soldiers; for had there been artillerymen to seize the moment when we were all standing exposed on the prairie, they might have diminished our numbers not a little. The fuse was already burning, and we had just time to get under the bank when the gun went off. Up we jumped again, and looked about us to see what was next to be done.

Although hitherto all the advantages had been on our side, our situation was still a very perilous one. The company we had put to flight had rejoined its battalion, which was now beginning to advance by *échelon* of companies. The second battalion, which was rather farther from us, was moving forward in like manner, and in a parallel direction. We should probably, therefore, have to resist the attack of a dozen companies, one after the other; and it was to be feared that the Mexicans would finish by getting over their panic terror of our rifles, and exchange their distant and ineffectual platoon-firing for a charge with the bayonet, in which their superior numbers would tell. We observed, also, that the cavalry, which had been keeping itself at a safe distance, was now put in motion, and formed up close to the island of muskeet trees, to which the right flank of the infantry was also extending itself. Thence they had clear ground for a charge down upon us.

Meanwhile, what had become of the twelve men whom we had left in the island? Were they still there, or had they fallen back upon the mission in dismay at the overwhelming force of the

Mexicans? If the latter, it was a bad business for us, for they were all capital shots, and well armed with rifles and pistols. We heartily wished we had brought them with us, as well as the eight men at the mission. Cut off from us as they were, what could they do against the whole of the cavalry and two companies of infantry which were now approaching the island? To add to our difficulties, our ammunition was beginning to run short. Many of us had only had enough powder and ball for fifteen or sixteen charges, which were now reduced to six or seven. It was no use desponding, however; and, after a hurried consultation, it was agreed that Fanning and Wharton should open a fire upon the enemy's centre, while I made a dash at the field-piece before any more infantry had time to come up for its protection.

The infantry-men who had re-manned the gun were by this time shot down, and, as none had come to replace them, it was served by an officer alone. Just as I gave the order to advance to the twenty men who were to follow me, this officer fell. Simultaneously with his fall, I heard a sort of yell behind me, and turning round, saw that it proceeded from the wild spectre-looking stranger, whom I had lost sight of during the last few minutes. A ball had struck him, and he fell heavily to the ground; his rifle, which had just been discharged, and was still smoking from muzzle and touchhole, clutched convulsively in both hands; his features distorted, his eyes rolling frightfully. There was something in the expression of his face at that moment which brought back to me, in vivid coloring, one of the earliest and most striking incidents of my residence in Texas. Had I not myself seen him hung, I could have sworn that *Bob Rock the murderer* now lay before me.

A second look at the man gave additional force to this idea.

"Bob!" I exclaimed.

"Bob!" repeated the wounded man, in a broken voice, and with a look of astonishment, almost of dismay. "Who calls Bob?"

A wild gleam shot from his eyes, which the next instant closed. He had become insensible.

It was neither the time nor the place to indulge in speculations on this singular resurrection of a man whose execution I had

myself witnessed. With twelve hundred foes around us, we had plenty to occupy all our thoughts and attention. My people were already masters of the gun, and some of them drew it forward and pointed it against the enemy, while the others spread out right and left, to protect it with their rifles. I was busy loading the piece when an exclamation of surprise from one of the men made me look up.

There seemed to be something extraordinary happening among the Mexicans, to judge from the degree of confusion which suddenly showed itself in their ranks, and which, beginning with the cavalry and right flank of the infantry, soon became general throughout their whole force. It was a sort of wavering and unsteadiness which, to us, was quite unaccountable, for Fanning and Wharton had not yet fired twenty shots, and, indeed, had only just come within range of the enemy. Not knowing what it could portend, I called in my men, and stationed them round the gun, which I had double-shotted, and stood ready to fire.

The confusion in the Mexican ranks increased. For about a minute they waved and reeled to and fro, as if uncertain which way to go; and at last, the cavalry and right of the line fairly broke, and ran for it. This example was followed by the centre, and presently the whole of the two battalions and three hundred cavalry were scattered over the prairie, in the wildest and most disorderly flight. I gave them a parting salute from the eight-pounder, which would doubtless have accelerated their movements, had it been possible to run faster than they were already doing.

We stood staring after the fugitives in perfect bewilderment, totally unable to explain their apparently causeless panic. At last the report of several rifles from the island of trees gave us the clue to the mystery.

Some six-and-thirty shots, every one of which told, fired suddenly from a cover close to their rear, were enough to startle even the best troops, much more so our Mexican Dons, who, already sufficiently inclined to a panic, now believed themselves fallen into an ambuscade, and surrounded on all sides by the incarnate *diablos*, as they called us. The cavalry, who had not yet recovered the

thrashing we had given them, were ready enough for a run, and the infantry were not slow to follow them.

Our first impulse was naturally to pursue the flying enemy, but a discovery made by some of the men, induced us to abandon that idea. They had opened the pouches of the dead Mexicans, in order to supply themselves with ammunition, ours being nearly expended ; but the powder of the cartridges turned out so bad as to be useless. It was little better than coal-dust, and would not carry a ball fifty paces to kill or wound. This accounted for our apparent invulnerability to the fire of the Mexicans. The muskets also were of a very inferior description. Both they and the cartridges were of English make ; the former being stamped " Birmingham," and the latter having the name of an English powder manufactory, with the significant addition, " for exportation."

Under these circumstances, we had nothing to do but let the Mexicans run. We sent a detachment to the muskeet island, to unite itself with the twelve men who had done such good service there, and thence advance toward the ford. We ourselves proceeded slowly in the other direction. This demonstration brought the fugitives back again, for they had, most of them, in the wild precipitation of their flight, passed the only place where they could cross the river. They began crowding over in the greatest confusion, foot and horse, all mixed up together ; and, by the time we got within a hundred paces of the ford, the prairie was nearly clear of them. There were still a couple of hundred men on our side of the water, completely at our mercy, and Wharton, who was a little in front with thirty men, gave the word to fire upon them. No one obeyed. He repeated the command. Not a rifle was raised. He stared at his men, astonished and impatient at this strange disobedience. An old weather-beaten bear-hunter stepped forward, squirting out his tobacco juice with all imaginable deliberation.

" I tell ye what, capting !" said he, passing his quid over from his right cheek to his left ; " I calkilate, capting," he continued, " we'd better leave the poor devils of dons alone."

" The poor devils of dons alone !" repeated Wharton in a rage. " Are ye mad, man ?"

Fanning and I had just come up with our detachment, and were not less surprised and angry than Wharton was, at this breach of discipline. The man, however, did not allow himself to be disconcerted.

"There's a proverb, gentlemen," said he, turning to us, "which says, that one should build a golden bridge for a beaten enemy; and a good proverb it is, I calculate—a considerable good one."

"What do you mean, man, with your golden bridge?" cried Fanning. "This is no time for proverbs."

"Do you know that you are liable to be punished for insubordination?" said I. "It's your duty to fire, and do the enemy all the harm you can; not to be quoting proverbs."

"Calculate it is," replied the man, very coolly. "Calculate I could shoot 'em without danger or trouble; but I reckon that would be like Spaniards or Mexicans; not like Americans—not prudent."

Untimely as this palaver, to use a popular word, undoubtedly was, we could scarcely forbear smiling at the simple *naïve* manner in which the old Yankee spoke his mind.

"Calculate, captings," he concluded, "you'd better let the poor devils run. We shall get more profit by it than if we shot five hundred of 'em. Next time they'll run away directly to show their gratitude for our generosity."

The man stepped back into the ranks, and his comrades nodded approvingly, and calculated and reckoned that Zebediah had spoke a true word; and meanwhile the enemy had crossed the river, and was out of our reach. We were forced to content ourselves with sending a party across the water to follow up the Mexicans, and observe the direction they took. We then returned to our old position.

My first thought on arriving there was to search for the body of Bob Rock—for he it undoubtedly was, who had so mysteriously appeared among us. I repaired to the spot where I had seen him fall; but could discover no signs of him, either dead or alive. I went over the whole scene of the fight, searched along the vines and along the bank of the river; there were plenty of dead Mexicans—cavalry, infantry, and artillery, but no Bob was to be found,

nor could any one inform me what had become of him, although several had seen him fall.

I was continuing my search, when I met Wharton, who asked me what I was seeking; and on learning, shook his head gravely. He had met the wild prairieman, he said, but whence he came, or whither he was gone, was more than he could tell. It was a long time since anything had startled and astonished him so much as this man's appearance and proceedings. He (Wharton) had been stationed with his party among the vines, and fifty paces in rear of Fanning's people, when just as the Mexican infantry had crossed the ford, and were forming up, he saw a man approaching at a brisk trot from the north side of the prairie. He halted about a couple of hundred yards from Wharton, tied his mustang to a bush, and with his rifle on his arm, strode along the edge of the prairie in the direction of the Mexicans. When he passed near Wharton, the latter called out to him to halt, and say who he was, whence he came, and whither going.

"Who I am is no business of yours," replied the man; "nor where I come from neither. You'll soon see where I'm goin'. I'm goin' agin' the enemy."

"Then you must come and join us," cried Wharton.

This the stranger testily refused to do. He'd fight on his own hook, he said.

Wharton told him he must not do that.

He should like to see who would hinder him, he said, and walked on. The next moment he shot the first artilleryman. After that they let him take his own way.

Neither Wharton, nor any of his men, knew what had become of him; but at last I met with a bear-hunter, who gave me the following information—

"Calkilatin'," said he, "that the wild prairieman's rifle was a capital good one, as good a one as ever killed a bear, he tho't it a pity that it should fall into bad hands, so went to secure it himself, although the frontispiece of its dead owner warn't very invitin'. But when he stooped to take the gun, he got such a shove as knocked him backward, and on getting up, he saw the prairieman openin' his jacket and examinin' a wound on his breast,

which was neither deep nor dangerous, although it had taken away the man's senses for a while. The ball had struck the breast bone, and was quite near the skin, so that the wounded man pushed it out with his fingers; and then supporting himself on his rifle, got up from the ground, and without either a thankye, or a d—nye, walked to where his mustang was tied up, got on its back, and rode slowly away in a northerly direction.

General Austin expressed his gratitude and approbation to our brave fellows, after a truly republican and democratic fashion. He shook hands with all the rough bear and buffalo hunters, and drank with them. Fanning and myself he promoted, on the spot, to the rank of colonel.

We were giving the general a detailed account of the morning's events, when a Mexican priest appeared with a flag of truce and several wagons, and craved permission to take away the dead. This was of course granted, and we had some talk with the padre, who, however, was too wily a customer to allow himself to be pumped. What little we did get out of him, determined us to advance the same afternoon against San Antonio. We thought there was some chance, that in the present panic-struck state of the Mexicans, we might obtain possession of the place by a bold and sudden assault.

San Antonio de Bexar lies in a fertile and well-irrigated valley, stretching westward from the river Salado. In the centre of the town rises the fort of the Alamo, which at that time was armed with forty-eight pieces of artillery of various calibre. The garrison of the town and fortress was nearly three thousand strong.

We were not discouraged, however, and opened our fire upon the city. During the first week, not a day passed without smart skirmishes. General Cos's dragoons were swarming about us like so many Bedouins. But although well-mounted, and capital horsemen, they were no match for our backwoodsmen. Those from the western States especially, accustomed to Indian warfare and cunning, laid traps and ambuscades for the Mexicans, and were constantly destroying their detachments. As for the besieged, if one of them showed his head for ten seconds above the city wall, he was sure of getting a rifle bullet through it. I cannot say that

our besieging army was a perfect model of military discipline; but any deficiencies in that respect were made good by the intelligence of the men, and the zeal and unanimity with which they pursued the accomplishment of one great object—the capture of the city—the liberty and independence of Texas.

The badness of the gunpowder used by the Mexicans was again of great service to us. Many of their cannon balls that fell far short of us, were collected and returned to them with powerful effect. We kept a sharp look-out for convoys, and captured no less than three—one of horses, another of provisions, and twenty thousand dollars in money.

After an eight weeks' siege, a breach having been made, the city surrendered, and a month later the fort followed the example. With a powerful park of artillery, we then advanced upon Goliad, the strongest fortress in Texas, which likewise capitulated in about four weeks' time. We were now masters of the whole country, and the war was apparently at an end.

But the Mexicans were not the people to give up their best province so easily. They have too much of the old Spanish character about them—that determined obstinacy which sustained the Spaniards during the protracted struggle with the Moors. The honor of their republic was compromised, and that must be redeemed. Thundering proclamations were issued, denouncing the Texans as rebels, who should be swept off the face of the earth, and threatening the United States for having aided us with money and volunteers. Ten thousand of the best troops in Mexico entered Texas, and were shortly to be followed by ten thousand more. The President, Gen. Santa Anna, himself came to take the command, attended by a numerous and brilliant staff.

The Texans laughed at the *fanfarronades* of the dons, and did not attach sufficient importance to these formidable preparations. Their good opinion of themselves, and contempt of their foes, had been increased to an unreasonable degree by their recent and rapid successes. They forgot that the troops to which they had hitherto been opposed, were for the most part militia, and that those now advancing against them were of a far better description, and had probably better powder. The call to arms made by our

president, Burnet, was disregarded by many, and we could only get together about two thousand men, of whom nearly two-thirds had to be left to garrison the forts of Goliad and Alamo. In the first named place we left seven hundred and sixty men, under the command of Fanning; in the latter, something more than five hundred. With the remaining seven or eight hundred we took the field.

The Mexicans advanced so rapidly, that they were upon us before we were aware of it, and we were compelled to retreat, leaving the garrisons of the two forts to their fate, and a right melancholy one it proved to be.

One morning news was brought to Goliad that a number of country people, principally women and children, were on their way to the fort, closely pursued by the Mexicans. Fanning, losing sight of prudence in his compassion for these poor people, immediately ordered a battalion of five hundred men, under the command of Major Ward, to go and meet the fugitives and escort them in. The major, and several officers of the garrison, doubted as to the propriety of this measure; but Fanning, full of sympathy for his unprotected country-women, insisted, and the battalion moved out. They soon came in sight of the fugitives, as they thought, but on drawing nearer, the latter turned out to be Mexican dragoons, who sprang upon their horses, which were concealed in the neighboring islands of trees, and a desperate fight began. The Mexicans, far superior in numbers, received every moment accessions to their strength. The Louis Potosi and Santa Fé cavalry, fellows who seem born on horseback, were there. Our unfortunate countrymen were hemmed in on all sides. The fight lasted two days, and only two men out of the five hundred escaped with their lives.

Before the news of this misfortune reached us, orders had been sent to Fanning to evacuate the fort and join us with six pieces of artillery. He received the order and proceeded to execute it. But what might have been very practicable for eight hundred and sixty men, was impossible for three hundred and sixty. Nevertheless, Fanning began his march through the prairie. His little band was almost immediately surrounded by the enemy. After

a gallant defence, which lasted twelve hours, they succeeded in reaching an island, but scarcely had they established themselves there, when they found that their ammunition was expended. There was nothing left for them, but to accept the terms offered by the Mexicans, who pledged themselves, that if they laid down their arms, they should be permitted to return to their homes. But the rifles were no sooner piled, than the Texans found themselves charged by their treacherous foes, who butchered them without mercy. Only an advanced post of three men succeeded in escaping.

The five hundred men whom we had left in San Antonio de Bexar, fared no better. Not being sufficiently numerous to hold out the town as well as the Alamo, they retreated into the latter. The Mexican artillery soon laid a part of the fort in ruins. Still its defenders held out. After eight days' fighting, during which the loss of the besiegers was tremendously severe, the Alamo was taken, and not a single Texan left alive.

We thus, by these two cruel blows, lost two thirds of our army, and little more than seven hundred men remained to resist the numerous legions of our victorious foe. The prospect before us was one well calculated to daunt the stoutest heart.

The Mexican general, Santa Anna, moved his army forward in two divisions, one stretching along the coast toward Velasco, the other advancing toward San Felipe de Austin. He himself, with a small force, marched in the centre. At Fort Bend, twenty miles below San Felipe, he crossed the Brazos, and shortly afterward established himself with about fifteen hundred men in an intrenched camp. Our army, under the command of General Houston, was in front of Harrisburg, to which place the congress had retreated.

It was on the night of the twentieth of April, and our whole disposable force, some seven hundred men, was bivouacking in and about an island of sycamores. It was a cloudy, stormy evening; a high wind was blowing, and the branches of the trees groaned and creaked above our heads. The weather harmonized well enough with our feelings, which were sad and desponding when we thought of the desperate state of our cause. We (the officers)

were sitting in a circle round the general and Alcalde, both of whom appeared uneasy and anxious. More than once they got up, and walked backward and forward, seemingly impatient, and as if they were waiting for or expecting something. There was a deep silence throughout the whole bivouac; some were sleeping, and those who watched were in no humor for idle chat.

"Who goes there?" suddenly shouted one of the sentries. The answer we did not hear, but it was apparently satisfactory, for there was no further challenge, and a few seconds afterward an orderly came up, and whispered something in the ear of the Alcalde. The latter hurried away, and presently returning, spoke a few words in a low tone to the general, and then to us officers. In an instant we were all upon our feet. In less than ten minutes, the bivouac was broken up, and our little army on the march.

All our people were well mounted, and armed with rifles, pistols, and bowie-knives. We had six field-pieces, but we took only four, harnessed with twice the usual number of horses. We marched at a rapid trot the whole night, led by a tall, gaunt figure of a man, who acted as our guide and kept some distance in front. I more than once asked the Alcalde who this was. "You will know, by and by," was his answer.

Before daybreak we had ridden five and twenty miles, but had been compelled to abandon two more guns. As yet, no one knew the object of this forced march. The general commanded a halt, and ordered the men to refresh and strengthen themselves by food and drink. While they were doing this, he assembled the officers around him, and the meaning of our night march was explained to us. The camp in which the Mexican president and general-in-chief had intrenched himself was within a mile of us; General Parza, with two thousand men, was twenty miles further to the rear; General Filasola, with one thousand, eighteen miles lower down on the Brazos; Viesca, with fifteen hundred, twenty-five miles higher up. One bold and decided blow, and Texas might yet be free. There was not a moment to lose, nor was one lost. The general addressed the men.

"Friends! brothers! citizens! General Santa Anna is within

a mile of us with fifteen hundred men. The hour that is to decide the question of Texian liberty is now arrived. What say you? Do we attack?"

"We do!" exclaimed the men, with one voice, cheerfully and decidedly.

In the most perfect stillness we arrived within two hundred paces of the enemy's camp. The *reveillé* of the sleeping Mexicans was the discharge of our two field-pieces loaded with canister. Rushing on to within twenty-five paces of the intrenchment, we gave them a deadly volley from our rifles, and then, throwing away the latter, bounded up the breastworks, a pistol in each hand. The Mexicans, scared and stupefied by this sudden attack, were running about in the wildest confusion, seeking their arms, and not knowing which way to turn. After firing our pistols, we threw them away as we had done our rifles, and drawing our bowie-knives, fell, with a shout, upon the masses of the terrified foe. It was more like the boarding of a ship than any land fight I had ever seen or imagined.

My station was on the right of the line, where the breastwork, ending in a redoubt, was steep and high. I made two attempts to climb up, but both times slipped back. On the third trial I nearly gained the summit; but was again slipping down, when a hand seized me by the collar, and pulled me up on the bank. In the darkness and confusion, I did not distinguish the face of the man who rendered me this assistance. I only saw the glitter of a bayonet which a Mexican thrust into his shoulder, at the very moment he was helping me up. He neither flinched nor let go his hold of me till I was fairly on my feet; then, turning slowly round, he levelled a pistol at the soldier, who, at that very moment, was struck down by the Alcalde.

"No thanks to ye, squire!" exclaimed the man, in a voice which made me start, even at that moment of excitement and bustle. I looked at the speaker, but could only see his back, for he had already plunged into the thick of the fight, and was engaged with a party of Mexicans, who defended themselves desperately. He fought like a man more anxious to be killed than to kill, striking furiously right and left, but never guarding a

blow, though the Alcalde, who was by his side, warded off several which were aimed at him.

By this time, my men had scrambled up after me. I looked round to see where our help was most wanted, and was about to lead them forward, when I heard the voice of the Alcalde.

"Are you badly hurt, Bob?" said he, in an anxious tone.

I glanced at the spot whence the voice came. There lay Bob Rock, covered with blood, and apparently insensible. The Alcalde was supporting his head upon his arm. Before I had time to give a second look, I was hurried forward with the rest toward the centre of the camp, where the fight was at the hottest.

About five hundred men, the pick of the Mexican army, had collected round a knot of staff-officers, and were making a most gallant defence. General Houston had attacked them with three hundred of our people, but had not been able to break their ranks. His charge, however, had shaken them a little, and, before they had time to recover from it, I came up. Giving a wild hurrah, my men fired their pistols, hurled them at their enemies' heads, and then springing over the creasses of the fallen, dashed like a thunderbolt into the broken ranks of the Mexicans.

A frightful butchery ensued. Our men, who were for the most part, and at most times, peaceable and humane in disposition, seemed converted into perfect fiends. Whole ranks of the enemy fell under their knives. Some idea may be formed of the horrible slaughter from the fact, that the fight, from beginning to end, did not last above ten minutes, and in that time nearly eight hundred Mexicans were shot or cut down. "No quarter!" was the cry of the infuriated assailants; "remember Alamo! Remember Goliad! Think of Fanning, Ward!" The Mexicans threw themselves on their knees, imploring mercy, "*Misericordia! Cuartel, por el amor de Dios!*" shrieked they in heart-rending tones; but their supplications were not listened to, and every man of them would inevitably have been butchered, had not Gen. Houston and the officers dashed in between the victors and the vanquished, and with the greatest difficulty, and by threats of cutting down our own men if they did not desist, put an end to this scene of bloodshed.

and saved the Texan character from the stain of unmanly cruelty.

When all was over, I hurried back to the place where I had left the Alcalde with Bob. The latter lay, bleeding from six wounds, only a few paces from the spot where he had helped me up the breastwork. The bodies of two dead Mexicans served him for a pillow. The Alcalde was kneeling by his side, gazing sadly and earnestly into the face of the dying man.

For Bob was dying; but it was no longer the death of the despairing murderer. The expression of his features was calm and composed and his eyes were raised to Heaven with a look of hope and supplication.

I stooped down and asked him how he felt himself, but he made no answer, and evidently did not recollect me. After a minute or two—

“How goes it with the fight?” he asked in a broken voice.

“We have conquered, Bob. The enemy killed or taken. Not a man escaped.”

He paused a little, and then spoke again.

“Have I done my duty? May I hope to be forgiven?”

The Alcalde answered him in an agitated voice:

“He who forgave the sinner on the cross, will doubtless be merciful to you, Bob. His holy book says: There is more joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just men. Be of good hope, Bob! the Almighty will surely be merciful to you!”

“Thank ye, squire,” gasped Bob, “you’re a true friend, a friend in life and death. Well it’s come at last,” said he, while a resigned and happy smile stole over his features. “I’ve prayed for it long enough. Thank God, it’s come at last!”

He gazed up at the Alcalde with a kindly expression of countenance. There was a slight shuddering movement of his whole frame—Bob was dead.

The Alcalde remained kneeling for a short time by the side of the corpse, his lips moving in prayer. At last he rose to his feet.

“God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he

may turn from his wickedness and live," said he, in a low and solemn tone. "I had those words in my thoughts four years ago, when I cut him down from the branch of the Patriarch."

"Four years ago!" cried I. "Then *you* cut him down, and were in time to save him? Was it he who yesterday brought us news of the vicinity of the foe?"

"It was, and much more than that has he done," replied the Alcalde, no longer striving to conceal the tears that fell from his eyes. "For four years has he dragged on his wretched existence, weary of the world, and despised of all men. For four years has he served us, lived, fought, and spied for us, without honor, reward, hope, or consolation—without a single hope of tranquillity, or a wish for aught except death. All this to serve Texas and his countrymen. Who shall say this man was not a true patriot? God will surely be merciful to his soul," said the Alcalde, after a pause.

"I trust he will," answered I deeply affected.

We were interrupted at this moment by a message from General Houston, to whom we immediately hastened. All was uproar and confusion. Santa Anna could not be found among the prisoners.

This was a terrible disappointment, for the capture of the Mexican president had been our principal object, and the victory we had gained was comparatively unimportant if he escaped. Indeed, the hope of putting an end to the war by his capture, had more than anything encouraged and stimulated us to the unequal conflict.

The moment was a very critical one. Among our men were thirty or forty most desperate characters, who began handling their knives, and casting looks upon the prisoners, the meaning of which it was impossible to mistake. Selecting some of our trustiest men, we stationed them as a guard over the captives, and, having thus assured the safety of the latter, began questioning them as to what had become of their general.

They had none of them seen Santa Anna since the commencement of the fight, and it was clear that he must have made his escape while we were getting over the breastworks. He could

not be very far off, and we at once took measures to find him. A hundred men were sent off with the prisoners to Harrisburg, and a hundred others, capittally mounted on horses found in the Mexican camp, started to scour the country in search of the fugitive chief. I accompanied the latter detachment.

We had been twelve hours in the saddle, and had ridden over nearly a hundred miles of ground. We began to despair of finding the game we were in quest of, and were thinking of abandoning the chase, when at a distance of about seven miles from the camp, one of our most experienced hunters discovered the print of a small and delicate foot upon some soft ground leading to a marsh. Following this trail, it at last led us to a man sunk up to his waist in the swamp, and so covered with mud and filth, as to be quite unrecognizable. We drew him from his hiding-place, half dead with cold and terror, and, having washed the dirt from his face, we found him to be a man of about forty years of age, with blue eyes, of a mild but crafty expression; a narrow, high forehead; long, thin nose, rather fleshy at the tip; projecting upper-lip, and long chin. These features tallied too exactly with the description we had had of the Mexican president, for us to doubt that our prisoner was Santa Anna himself.

The only thing that at all tended to shake this conviction, was the extraordinary poltroonery of our new captive. He threw himself on his knees, begging us, in the name of God and all the saints, to spare his life. Our reiterated assurances and promises were insufficient to convince him of his being in perfect safety, or to induce him to adopt a demeanor more consistent with his dignity and high station.

The events which succeeded this fortunate capture, are too well known to require more than a very brief recapitulation. The same evening a truce was agreed upon between Houston and Santa Anna, the latter sending orders to his different generals to retire upon San Antonio de Bexar, and other places in the direction of the Mexican frontier. These orders, valueless as emanating from a prisoner, most of the generals were weak or cowardly enough to obey, an obedience for which they were afterward

brought to trial by the Mexican congress. In a few days, two-thirds of Texas were in our possession.

The news of these successes brought crowds of volunteers to our standard. In three weeks we had an army of several thousand men, with which we advanced against the Mexicans. There was no more fighting, however, our antagonists had had enough, and allowed themselves to be driven from one position to another, till, in a month's time, there was not one left in the country.

* * * * *

On passing through the scenes of my Mexican wanderings on my return from Texas, I gleaned a few brief particulars in reference to some of the personages who have borne a conspicuous part in these pages.

We found the contemptible Lieutenant bestialized with whisky to the verge of idiocy. On inquiring of his chaste and delectable wife as to what had happened, we learned that on the evening of the day after we left, the Colonel had been shot, as he strolled listlessly and without any precaution about his premises. The rumor was that Agatone, accompanied by the old Señora and three men, had fired upon him from a thicket. He fell, and they rushed out too soon—for before they could finish him he shot one of them through the head, and it was thought had mortally wounded the old Senora. The ferocious Agatone had cut off his ears, and thrust them down his throat while he was dying, with the handle of his knife, and otherwise horribly mutilated his body, which was left for the wolves to devour. It was said that the boy John led the party—how he had come to life was a problem to me. Antone had never been heard of. I suppose the wolves made a meal of him after I left. But enough of horrors! Black, I forgot to mention, had disappeared during the night of the siege—no one knew where! Bill had accompanied us and performed wonders of sagacity and skill in his peculiar department—we left him with Hays in Bexar.

The cunning Agatone is, for all I know, at this very time a

scatheless cut-throat on that troubled frontier. Castro and his Lipans are still, I believe, the frontier allies of Captain (now Colonel) Hays. The old Señora never entirely recovered, and I have heard since I left the country, that she was literally "roasted alive" in her bed some time afterwards, when the indignant Texans who had rallied to the frontier, reduced her Rancho—what of it could be burned—to ashes, and left no "*Doby* upon another" of the rest!

